IRAN: A STUDY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Iran has threatened U.S. security interests, pursued greater regional dominance, and displayed belligerence toward U.S. allies. To mitigate these challenges, policymakers and scholars should seek a greater understanding of Iran's behavior. This thesis portfolio provides insight into Iran's international, regional, and national behavior by combining knowledge traditionally contained in area studies with revolutionary and international relations theories. In chapter one, the thesis considers the United States' relationship with Iran, with a particular focus on determining what policies would most effectively lessen the threat of Iran's nuclear program. This chapter recommends that the United States maintain sanctions, increase public diplomacy efforts, and continue engagement attempts towards Iran. Sanctions and negotiations should be conducted multilaterally, whenever possible, to increase U.S. legitimacy and ensure the prudent use of U.S. power. Chapter two considers how Shiism affects Iran's posture in the Middle East. Although Shiism has an influence on Iran's regional policies, this chapter argues that pragmatism plays a greater role in Iranian policymaking. Finally, by analyzing the stability of Iran's regime through the lens of revolutionary theory, chapter three demonstrates that most scholars have likely overestimated the Iranian regime's longevity.

As discussed in this thesis portfolio, the United States must chart a course with Iran that simultaneously attempts to improve U.S.-Iran relations, mitigate security concerns, and reassure U.S. allies in the region. The United States' relationship with Iran will likely remain strained, at least for the near future. However, a better understanding of the nation should enable scholars and policymakers to improve this relationship.

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Introduction

The United States' relationship with Iran has been difficult since the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent founding of the Islamic Republic. From the Iranian hostage crisis to former president George W. Bush's axis of evil speech, the two countries' relations have been characterized by hostility, distrust, and polarization. U.S.-Iran relations are currently at a critical juncture as nuclear talks continue under the presidential leadership of Iran's Hassan Rouhani. Moreover, Iran's support of terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, along with the nation's controversial nuclear program, poses security challenges for the United States and its allies, including Israel.

As a country with large oil reserves, Iran's behavior also has implications for U.S. energy security. In particular, the nation ranks second in the world for natural gas reserves and fourth for proven oil reserves. Despite U.S. and European Union sanctions targeting Iranian oil exports, Iran exported enough oil in 2012 to rank as one of the world's 10 highest exporters.[1] Iran's jurisdiction over the northern coast of the strategic Strait of Hormuz provides the nation with additional leverage. Should this waterway in the Persian Gulf close, markets would lose one fourth of the world's supply of oil. Regardless of whether Iran could successfully block the strait,[2] the nation's power is enhanced by its control over part of this waterway.[3] Policymakers and scholars should also be interested in Iran because of the nation's key position of power in the Middle

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1 U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), "Iran: Country Analysis Brief Overview," updated March 28, 2013, http://www.eia.gov/countries/country-data.cfm?fips=IR (accessed February 22, 2014).

2 Caitlin Talmadge, "Closing Time: Assessing the Iranian Threat to the Strait of Hormuz," *International Security* 33, no. 1 (summer 2008): 82, 86.

3 *Ibid*.

East. In recent years, Iran has pursued policies designed to further its rise as a regional hegemon. Such a rise could further threaten U.S. security interests.

Thus, now more than ever, it is crucial for policymakers and scholars to understand Iran's behavior. However, many scholars and policymakers have failed in this task. For instance, U.S. policymakers have displayed ignorance of differences between Sunni and Shia Islam[4] – a crucial distinction especially needed for understanding Iran, a predominantly Shia country. Additionally, as Vali Nasr notes, "neither Shia nor Sunni beliefs and views of each other are monolithic."[5] Scholars and policymakers should recognize that Iran's version of Shiism, which allows for clerics to rule under the concept of *velayat-e faqih*, differs from other interpretations of Shiism, including the quietist version held by Iraq's Grand Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani.[6]

Moreover, while area studies scholars display a deep knowledge of Iran's history, ideology, and religion, their work sometimes fails to incorporate revolutionary and international relations theories. Conversely, theorists are often seemingly uninterested in applying their ideas to area studies. This thesis argues that scholars and policymakers must pursue a holistic understanding of Iran by combining a variety of scholarship, including area studies and theory.

This thesis portfolio examines a variety of area studies scholarship relating to Iran, particularly focusing on scholarship that explains Iran's foreign policy and internal

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4 Jeff Stein, "Can You Tell a Sunni From a Shiite?" *The New York Times*, October 17, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/17/opinion/17stein.html?pagewanted=all (accessed August 5, 2012).

5 Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2007 and 2006), 58.

6 *Ibid.*, 125, 142, 145.

stability. Several schools of thought on Iranian foreign policy exist. First, some scholars argue that Iran seeks to rise as a regional hegemon. For example, Nasr asserts, "Since 2003 Iran has shown a more confident but also military strident face as it has rebuffed international efforts to stop its nuclear program and asserted its claim to regional power."[7] Moreover, Nasr argues that the fall of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein's government enabled Iran to obtain increased influence in the region.[8] Second, multiple scholars assert that Iran is a rational actor whose foreign policies are driven by pragmatism. A report from several RAND analysts summarizes this view: "Our exploration of Iranian strategic thinking revealed that ideology and bravado frequently mask a preference for opportunism and realpolitik–the qualities that define 'normal' state behavior."[9]

Third, scholars seem to agree that Shiism plays a role in Iranian foreign policy, but disagree on the extent of that role. For example, some see Shiism as a driving force behind Iran's nuclear program. Mehdi Khalaji contends that former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a part of an apocalyptic secret society that may have jurisdiction over Iran's nuclear program. The group believes that the Hidden Imam, a figure in Shia Islam, will return more quickly via the use of advanced technology.[10] Additionally, Jeffrey Haynes asserts, "Many argue that a religious component underpins

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7 *Ibid.*, 268.

8 *Ibid.*, 222.

9 Frederic Wehrey et al., *Dangerous But Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East* (RAND: Santa Monica, 2009), p. xiii-xiv.

10 Mehdi Khalaji, *Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Policy* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2008), http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus79Final.pdf (accessed August 12, 2012), vii.

Iran's nuclear programme *[sic]*, which allegedly grows out of an apocalyptic vision envisaging widespread devastation or ultimate doom."[11] However, scholars like Shahram Chubin[12] and Gawdat Bahgat[13] see Iran's nuclear program as driven by pragmatic objectives such as a desire for regional influence. This thesis explores these schools of thought, arguing that Iran is seeking to obtain greater influence in the region, and that Shiism's influence on Iranian foreign policy is secondary to matters of pragmatism.

Although area studies scholars have contributed to a body of literature on Iran's foreign policy behavior, scholarship on Iran's internal stability is limited. Scholars who have considered the topic usually agree that Iran will not experience a revolution in the near future. For instance, Jack A. Goldstone[14] outlines a variety of factors he believes contributes to Iran's internal stability, including the existence of multiple, strong leaders; the pro-regime Basij and Revolutionary Guards; and widespread approval of regime ideologies.[15] Similarly, Nikkie Keddie asserts that Iran's Persian identity will likely prevent the Arab Spring from inspiring a revolution in Iran.[16] One voice of dissent is

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11 Jeffrey Haynes, "Religion and Foreign Policy Making in the USA, India and Iran: towards a research agenda," *Third World Quarterly* 29 no. 1 (2008): 160.

12 Shahram Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 8, 16.

13 Gawdat Bahgat, "Iran and the United States: The Emerging Security Paradigm in the Middle East," *Parameters* (summer 2006): 5-18, http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/Articles/07summer/bahgat.htm (accessed August 11, 2012).

14 Although Jack Goldstone's views are included in this section, he should not be considered an area studies scholar.

15 Jack A. Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies," *Foreign Affairs* 90 (May/June 2011): n.p.

16 Nikkie R. Keddie, "Arab and Iranian Revolts 1979-2011: Influences or Similar Causes?," *Intl J. Middle East Stud.* 44 (2012): 151.

Jonathan Powell, who argues: "The Iranians have been helping the Syrians with their techniques of suppression. Once the young people of Iran see that those methods do not work and that the corrupt Assad regime can be overthrown, they will feel emboldened to take up their unfinished revolution once again."[17] Additionally, when modernization and structural revolutionary theory is applied to the situation in Iran, regime stability seems less than certain.

To understand Iran's nuclear program and its regional ambitions, this thesis also examines a variety of international relations theories, such as realism (including classical realism, neorealism, the realist offense-defense theory, and the hegemonic stability theory), liberalism, and constructivism. The thesis seeks to combine these theories with area studies to provide an informed perspective on Iran.

Chapter One

This thesis portfolio explores various topics relating to Iran's behavior in the international, regional, and national spheres. Chapter one examines Iran's *international* behavior by analyzing U.S.-Iran relations in the context of Iran's nuclear program. In particular, this chapter aims to discover which policies could most successfully curb or slow Iran's nuclear program. First, the chapter considers uses two major international theories – realism and liberalism – to shed light on Iran's nuclear program and U.S. policy considerations. Both realists and liberals tend to view the current international system as unipolar, with the United States holding the position of the world's hegemon. However, realists anticipate that weaker states will restore the balance of power and end the current unipolar configuration. In contrast, liberals believe that if the United States

17 Jonathan Powell, "A Lasting Glow: Seizing the Optimism of the Arab Spring," *Public Policy Research* 18 (December-February 2012): 208.

exercises its power judiciously via institutions and partnerships, it could prolong its hegemonic status.

Throughout the chapter, realist and liberal concepts are used to explain the motives driving Iran's nuclear program and interpret U.S. policy options. The chapter argues that Iran's nuclear program is motivated at least partially by a sense of insecurity, which was exacerbated by the United States' increased presence in the region during the 1990s. Thus, when negotiating with Iran regarding its nuclear program, the United States should try to address security concerns and reassure the nation. Moreover, the United States should act multilaterally when possible, as this increases legitimacy, lessens the likelihood that countries like Iran will feel threatened by unilateral displays of U.S. power, and buttresses the U.S.'s status as the world's hegemon.

Second, this chapter provides an overview of the Iranian nuclear program. Evidence presented in this section demonstrates that Iran has a uranium enrichment program and seeks a self-sustaining nuclear fuel cycle. While Iran's intentions regarding nuclear weapons are difficult to determine, Iran's behavior is worrisome, especially considering that the IAEA cannot determine whether "all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities."[18] In addition, the chapter disagrees with neorealist scholar Kenneth Waltz's view of nuclear weapons – particularly the notion that an Iranian bomb would be a positive development for the region. If Iran develops a nuclear weapon, it will likely not use the weapon except as a last resort. However, because a nuclear weapon would

18 International Atomic Energy Agency, *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, February 21, 2013, http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2013/gov2013-6.pdf (accessed March 17, 2014), 12.

increase Iran's international leverage, the United States should attempt to prevent Iran from developing such a weapon.

Finally, this chapter considers U.S. policy options towards Iran, including traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy, and sanctions. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the United States should maintain engagement with Iran by participating in multilateral nuclear talks, support reform in Iran by increasing public diplomacy, and demonstrate disapproval of Iran's nuclear program by continuing sanctions unless a favorable agreement is reached. The United States should continue efforts to levy sanctions via international institutions, as multilateral sanctions will likely have a greater impact than those levied unilaterally. These policies should help address the threat of Iran's nuclear program while also promoting a judicious use of U.S. power.

Chapter Two

Chapter two considers how Iran's Shia identity influences the nation's *regional* foreign policy posture. To understand Iran as a regional actor, the chapter begins by considering two international relations theories: neorealism and constructivism. This chapter argues that neorealism's balance of power concept could be useful for understanding the Middle East, but the theory's exclusive focus on state behavior prevents the theory from aligning with current regional power dynamics. Constructivism helps scholars understand the important role of identity and state interest in the Middle East, but unlike realism, does not provide insight into how scholars can ascertain state intentions. This chapter argues that neorealism should be modified or discarded in favor of a theory that recognizes sectarian forces and non-state groups as elements of the balance of power equation. Although Middle Eastern conflicts are not always related to

Sunni and Shia dynamics, Sunni and Shia Islam's polarizing influence in the Middle East is significant and should be recognized by international relations theory.

Next, chapter two considers how Shiism influences major policy objectives of Iran, including its hegemonic goals, relations with Iraq, nuclear capabilities, and support of groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. This section argues that Shiism's impact on these policies varies depending on whether Iran is relating to other Shia communities or appealing to a broader, Sunni audience. Nonetheless, pragmatism, rather than Shiism, seems to be the primary driver of Iran's major foreign policy decisions.

Chapter Three

Finally, chapter three considers the *national* topic of Iranian regime stability. This chapter seeks to answer three questions relating to Iran's regime. First, will Iran remain stable under its current system of government? Second, will its regime be challenged by social unrest or possibly overturned? Third, is it even possible to predict Iran's future? To explore these questions, the chapter adopts Theda Skocpol's definition of revolutions as "rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures . . . accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below."[19]

The chapter begins by examining scholarship relating to Iran's regime stability, which tends to view Iran's regime as stable. Next, the chapter analyzes revolutionary theories that could help scholars more accurately predict revolutions, especially if combined with area scholarship focused on historical and religious factors. Specifically, modernization theory suggests that scholars should evaluate the nation's economy when considering whether a nation is vulnerable to revolt. According to this theory, Iran's poor

19 Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 4.

economic conditions could possibly lead to a revolution, but rapid economic expansion could also cause instability. Next, structural theory should prompt scholars to evaluate strengths and weaknesses present in a nation's government. This theory indicates that Iran's regime could be unstable due to the existence of Iranian opposition groups and Iran's highly competitive relationships with several other nations.

Finally, this chapter challenges the assumption, made by a majority of scholars, that Iran's regime is durable and will remain in power for the foreseeable future. Although additional research needs to be conducted on Iranian regime stability, current evidence suggests that Iran's regime could be vulnerable to a future revolution. Nonetheless, the chapter cautions that a revolution in Iran might not be a positive development for U.S.-Iran relations. As Jack Goldstone argues, ". . . revolutions have often resulted in the exchange of one set of problems . . . for another set of problems."[20]

This thesis portfolio emphasizes that policymaking and scholarship relating to Iran should be grounded in a solid understanding of area studies. International relations and revolutionary theory also provide a framework for understanding Iran, as they provide important insights into state behavior and regime stability. However, these theories should not be taken in a vacuum, but instead be combined with a firm grasp of area studies. Ultimately, if scholars and policymakers develop a more holistic understanding of Iran's behavior, they should be better equipped to recommend and enact policies that will improve the United States' relationship with Iran.

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20 Jack A. Goldstone, ed., *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 321.

Chapter 1: U.S. Foreign Policy and Iran's Nuclear Pursuits

Iran has pursued controversial foreign policy objectives since becoming an Islamic Republic[21] in 1979.[22] From the United States' perspective as articulated by the 2010 United States National Security Strategy, ". . . the Islamic Republic of Iran has endangered the security of the region and the United States and failed to live up to its international responsibilities." The National Security Strategy identifies several topics of concern to the United States: Iran's nuclear ambitions, sponsorship of terrorism, subversion of Israel-Palestine peace, and human rights record.[23] U.S. foreign policy toward Iran was further complicated by Iran's former president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose hardline stance toward the United States[24] was a departure from the more accommodating policies of the previous president, Mohammad Khatami.[25] The U.S.'s relationship with Iran continues to be a crucial policy issue, especially considering Iran's participation in nuclear talks under the new leadership of President Hassan Rouhani.[26]

In light of these challenges and developments, this chapter examines various foreign policy options the United States could adopt toward Iran. Because Iran's nuclear program is a particularly difficult and salient issue for U.S. policymakers, the chapter

21 Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, ed., *Iran's Foreign Policy: From Khatami to Ahmadinejad* (Berkshire: Ithaca Press, 2008), vii.

22 Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 16.

23 President of the United States, "National Security Strategy," The White House, May 2010, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf (accessed October 27, 2012), 26.

24 Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Democracy Promotion versus Engagement with Iran," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 41, no. 3 (August 2011): 475.

25 *Ibid.*, 472.

26 Martin Baron and Anne Gearan, "Rouhani Says Iran has 'serious will' to make a deal on nuclear program," *The Washington Post*, January 23, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/rouhani-says-iran-has-serious-will-to-make-a-deal-on-nuclear-program/2014/01/23/eb4ae534-843c-11e3-8099-9181471f7aaf_story.html (accessed January 30, 2014).

seeks to determine which U.S. policies would most effectively slow or halt the Iran's nuclear ambitions. First, this chapter introduces two prominent international relations theories, and subsequently uses these theories to interpret Iran's behavior and inform U.S. policymaking. In order to provide context for analyzing policy options, this chapter next presents an overview of Iran's nuclear program. Third, this chapter will assess various policy options, including traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy, sanctions, and combined policy approaches. Also considered is the pessimist position that the United States may not be able to halt Iran's nuclear ambitions.

This chapter concurs with the realist assertion that Iran is unlikely to use a nuclear weapon offensively. However, it argues that preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon will further U.S. interests. This chapter also asserts that while U.S. policies may not thwart Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, the United States should adopt a multi-policy approach as long as the possibility of prevention exists. A review of relevant literature reveals that most scholars' policy recommendations are unnecessarily narrow. A multi-policy approach can be employed when policy options are not viewed as mutually exclusive, but instead are seen as various means to achieve a common end. In particular, the United States should employ a mix of engagement, public diplomacy, and sanctions aimed at tempering the Iranian regime. The United States should continue engagement attempts with Iran, rewarding compliance with the carrot of reduced sanctions.[27] However, the United States and the international community should refuse

27 On February 3, 2014, White House officials informed a Senate panel of the continued existence of international sanctions. Treasury Department undersecretary David Cohen said that "if these talks turn into deals that violate the elaborate sanctions that remain in place . . . we will take action . . ." See Paul Richter, "Iran Sanctions Remain Despite Nuclear Deal, U.S. Officials Say," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 2014, http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-iran-congress-20140205,0,5032344.story#axzz2sV7JR5hI (accessed February 5, 2014).

to remove all sanctions unless a significant, comprehensive agreement is reached. Moreover, whenever possible, the United States should seek to act multilaterally and utilize international institutions, as such actions can help maintain the United States' position of power in the international system.

International Relations Theory and U.S.-Iran Relations

In order to understand the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program and determine how the United States should respond, scholars and policymakers should consider insights contained in international relations theories. This section will examine two major international relations theories – realism and liberalism. Subsequently, the paper will use principles from those theories to better understand Iran's behavior and suggest effective policies towards Iran.[28]

An alternate approach could examine policy options in light of historic U.S. foreign policy. For instance, scholars and policymakers could consider George Washington's Farewell Address of 1795, in which Washington warned against foreign entanglements.[29] Abraham Lincoln, likewise, resisted foreign entanglements by managing to prevent Europe from supporting the Confederacy.[30] While these concepts were certainly important for a fledgling nation, the United States' present role as a world hegemon necessitates that the nation take a different course. As Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson argue, Washington's "'great rule of conduct' was not set forth as

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28 A third major international relations theory, constructivism, will be discussed in the second chapter of this thesis.

29 "Washington's Farewell Address 1796," Yale Law School, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp (accessed May 4, 2014).

30 Kevin Peraino, *Lincoln in the World: The Making of a Statesman and the Dawn of American Power* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2013), n.p.

an absolute principle that represented, whatever the circumstances, the timeless interests of the nation, but as a policy for a state of only modest power that was consolidating a newly won independence and a still precarious security."[31] Given the United States' current position in the world, international relations theories will have more applicability to the problems contemporary scholars and policymakers face.

Realist scholar Stephen Walt identifies the importance of international relations theory in the context of policymaking: "Everyone uses theories – whether he or she knows it or not – and disagreements about policy usually rest on more fundamental disagreements about basic forces that shape international forces."[32] Jack Snyder argues that international theories are most helpful in "providing the vocabulary and conceptual framework to ask hard questions of those who think that changing the world is easy."[33] Snyder suggests that while theories have weaknesses, policymakers need not view insights from theories as mutually exclusive. He states, "In lieu of a good theory of change, the most prudent course is to use the insights of each . . . as a check on the irrational exuberance of the others."[34]

Realism

Stephen Walt explains that realism "depicts international affairs as a struggle for power among self-interested states and is generally pessimistic about the prospects for

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31 Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, "Thomas Jefferson and American Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 9, no. 2 (spring 1990): 147.

32 Stephen M. Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1998): 29.

33 Jack Snyder, "One World, Rival Theories," *Foreign Policy* (November 1, 2004), http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2004/11/01/one_world_rival_theories (accessed November 30, 2012).

34 *Ibid*.

eliminating conflict and war."[35] According to realist scholar John Mearsheimer, realism emphasizes the following five assumptions: the anarchic nature of the international system; the ability of states to militarily attack one another; the uncertain nature of state intentions; the importance of survival as a motivator of state behavior; and the fact that states consider how they can ensure their own survival.[36]

Realism has several subsets, including classical realism, neorealism, the realist offense-defense theory, and the hegemonic stability theory. Classical realism asserts that states are driven to war because of their inherent propensity toward domination.[37] According to another subset of realism, the realist offense-defense theory, peace is more likely to occur when states are able to defend themselves. Walt explains, "For these 'defensive' realists, states merely sought to survive and great powers could guarantee their security by balancing alliances and choosing defensive military postures (such as retaliatory nuclear forces)."[38] Realism also offers differing views on hegemonic powers. In one variation, a hegemonic power is considered threatening because it can attempt to control other states. However, according to the hegemonic stability theory, a hegemonic state can use its power to enforce peace.[39]

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35 Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," 31.

36 John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19, no. 3 (winter 1994/1995): 10.

37 T.V. Paul, "Regional Transformation in International Relations," in *International Relations Theory and Regional Transformation*, ed. T.V. Paul, 3-21 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7.

38 Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," 31.

39 Paul, 8.

Amongst realism's contributions to international relations, two related topics stand out: the balance of power theory and the concept of hegemony.[40] Neorealism emphasizes the tendency of less powerful states to try to balance stronger states,[41] which is considered necessary for maintaining regional stability.[42] States engage in balancing behavior to prevent hegemony, "a situation in which one state amasses so much power that it is able to dominate the rest of the states in the system, which would put an end to the multistate system."[43]

Many scholars assert that the current international system is unipolar, with the United States holding the position as the world's dominant power.[44] A variety of evidence demonstrates that this is the case: the United States has the largest military in the world, a more powerful navy than the rest of the world's navies combined, and defense expenditures that equal nearly fifty percent of all military spending worldwide.[45] According to Kenneth N. Waltz, a unipolar system is the least resilient arrangement for two primary reasons. First, the predominant state tends to overextend itself and ultimately weakens its own power. Evidence of overextension can be seen in the United States' recent foreign policy choices – for instance, U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

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40 G. John Ikenberry, "Introduction," in *America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power*, ed. G. John Ikenberry, 1-26 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 7.

41 Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," 31.

42 Paul, 7.

43 Jack S. Levy, "What Do Great Powers Balance Against and When?" in *Balance of Power*: *Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, ed. T.V. Paul et al, 29-51 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 32.

44 Kenneth N. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," *International Security 25*, no. 1 (summer 2000): 28.

45 Nuno P. Monteiro, "Unrest Assured: Why Unipolarity is Not Peaceful," *International Security* 36, no. 3 (winter 2011/2012): 9.

have stretched the nation's resources.[46] Second, "even if a dominant power behaves with moderation, restraint, and forbearance, weaker states will worry about its future behavior. . . . Faced with unbalanced power, some states try to increase their own strength or they ally with others to bring the international distribution of power into balance."[47]

Under the balance of power concept, weaker states should balance against the United States and end the current system of unipolarity. Snyder, however, asserts that "no combination of states or other powers can challenge the United States militarily, and no balancing coalition is imminent."[48] Nonetheless, both Russia and China seem to be rising powers.[49] Additionally, realism's balance of power concept could be valid even if countries currently lack the ability to challenge the United States. As Kenneth Waltz argues, "realist theory predicts that balances disrupted will one day be restored," but the theory is limited because "it cannot say when."[50] Moreover, Waltz explains that while balancing within the international system usually occurs, it is not inevitable.[51] Even so, the current system, which has remained unipolar since the fall of the Soviet Union, appears to be more resilient than it should be if it is truly the least stable arrangement.[52]

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46 *Ibid.*, 11.

47 Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," 27-28.

48 Snyder.

49 Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," 32.

50 *Ibid.*, 27.

51 *Ibid.*, 38.

52 *Ibid.*, 27.

An alternate explanation advanced by liberal theories posits that institutional structures influence whether states need to engage in balancing. Ikenberry explains that under this school of thought, "American hegemonic power is rendered more acceptable to others because of the dense institutional structures in which it is situated."[53] Conversely, states could attempt to balance U.S. power via international institutions. The behavior of Germany and France toward the United States seems to support this argument. As Snyder notes, "these states have tried to undermine U.S. moral legitimacy and constrain the superpower in a web of multilateral institutions and treaty regimes –not what standard realist theory predicts."[54]

Liberalism

Liberal ideas can be seen as emanating from the Enlightenment, when thinkers believed the world could be improved through reason.[55] According to Robert O. Keohane, liberalism is defined as follows:

> . . . an approach to the analysis of social reality that (1) begins with individuals as the relevant actors, (2) seeks to understand how aggregations of individuals make collective decisions and how organizations composed to individuals interact, and (3) embeds this analysis in a world view that emphasizes individual rights and adopts an ameliorative view of progress in human affairs.[56]

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53 Ikenberry, 6.

54 Snyder.

55 John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001), 15.

56 Robert O. Keohane, "International Liberalism Reconsidered," in *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World*, ed. Robert O. Keohane, 39-62 (London: Routledge, 2002), 45.

Keohane outlines several subsets of liberalism: commercial liberalism, which emphasizes trade; regulatory liberalism, which focuses on the importance of institutions and rules; and republican liberalism, which asserts the peaceful nature of republics.[57]

One of liberalism's key strengths is the concept of democratic peace theory, or the idea that democracies do not fight amongst themselves. Snyder calls this concept the "the closest thing we have to an iron law in social science."[58] According to liberal scholar Michael Doyle, "Even though liberal states have become involved in numerous wars with nonliberal states, constitutionally secure liberal states have yet to engage in war with one another."[59] Similarly, in his 1795 work, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch*, Immanuel Kant argues that nations with Republican constitutions are more likely to be peaceful, as citizens of these nations will be inclined to regard war cautiously.[60]

However, as a result of this notion, liberal nations may be inclined to engage in conflicts with nonliberal states in attempts to spread democracy. Snyder explains: ". . . Michael W. Doyle's articles on democratic peace warned that, though democracies never fight each other, they are prone to launch messianic struggles against warlike authoritarian regimes to 'make the world safe for democracy.'"[61] In addition, attempts to "make the world safe for democracy" can backfire, as recent world events have

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57 *Ibid.*, 46, 49, 51.

58 Snyder.

59 Michael W. Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12, no. 3 (summer 1983): 205-235.

60 Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795), accessed November 20, 2012, https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/kant/kant1.htm.

61 Snyder.

demonstrated. For example, many scholars argue that the United States' efforts to establish a democracy in Iraq led to an unplanned outcome: due to the vacuum created by forcefully removing Saddam Hussein's authoritarian regime, the regional balance of power in the Middle East shifted, allowing Iran to take more aggressive steps towards attaining regional hegemony.

In addition to democratic peace theory, another potential strength of liberalism is its positive view of institutions. Keohane defines institutional liberalism as "the view that cooperation in world politics can be enhanced through the construction and support of multilateral institutions based on liberal principles."[62] In contrast, realist scholars tend to have a negative view towards international institutions.[63] As Mearsheimer argues, "Realists maintain that institutions are basically a reflection of the distribution of power in the world. They are based on the self-interested calculations of the great powers, and they have no independent effect on state behavior. Realists therefore believe that institutions are not an important cause of peace."[64] However, John Gerard Ruggie points out that institutions have actually enhanced international security in a variety of ways. For example, during Eisenhower's presidency, realists disparaged nuclear nonproliferation agreements. Yet, problematic countries such as South Africa, Brazil, and Argentina have since determined not to develop nuclear weapons, which indicates that nonproliferation efforts have had at least some success.[65]

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62 Robert O. Keohane, "Twenty Years of Institutional Liberalism," *International Relations* 26, no. 2 (2012): 125.

63 John Gerard Ruggie, "The False Premise of Realism," *International Security* 20, no. 1 (summer 1995): 67.

64 Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," 7.

65 Ruggie, 62, 65.

Realism, Liberalism, and Policymaking

Realism and liberalism provide different interpretations of three important concepts: polarity, balancing, and institutions. Understanding these concepts is crucial because they hold implications for policymaking and the United States' overarching foreign policy strategy.[66] While theorists from both camps tend to agree that the current system is unipolar, realists expect the current configuration to end when weaker states balance against U.S. power. Realist principles suggest that, in the meantime, the United States should avoiding weakening its hegemonic status by overextending itself internationally. In addition, the United States should avoid actions that could accelerate the balancing process, such as exuberant displays of power. Waltz warns: "The United States cannot prevent a new balance of power from forming. It can hasten its coming as it has been earnestly doing."[67] Realism also suggests that policymakers should place less emphasis on institutions, as they merely reflect existing power equations.

In contrast, liberals believe that by properly exercising power in the context of institutions and partnerships, the United States can prolong its international influence.[68] As Ikenberry and Kupchan argue, "a dominant America that reassures others and deploys its power to secure public goods induces systemic stability . . ."[69] This type of behavior differs sharply from the foreign policy agenda pursued by the George W. Bush

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66 G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, "Liberal Realism: The Foundations of A Democratic Foreign Policy," *The National Interest* (fall 2004): 38.

67 Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War," 38.

68 Ikenberry and Kupchan, 40.

69 *Ibid.*, 39.

administration, which attempted to preclude balancing by increasing U.S. projections of power. However, Ikenberry and Kupchan assert that this strategy actually prompts other states to balance against the United States.[70]

As Jack Snyder suggests, realism and liberalism have both strengths and weaknesses. Because one theory alone is insufficient to explain Iran's behavior and inform policy options, this chapter borrows from both theories. Having identified the central tenants of realism and liberalism, the following section will consider Iran's nuclear program in light of these theories to gain greater insight into Iran's possible motivations.

Iran's Nuclear Program

Historical Background of Iran's Nuclear Program

In order to determine what policies the United States should adopt toward Iran, it is essential to consider the background and scope of Iran's nuclear program. This section will examine the history of Iran's nuclear program, consider Iran's nuclear capabilities, and analyze Iran's intentions regarding developing a nuclear weapon. While conducting this analysis, this section will also draw upon international relations theory to explain Iran's actions. Iran's nuclear program started in the mid-1960s under Iran's former monarchy.[71] In 1968, Iran signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT),[72] a United Nations treaty that advances nuclear disarmament and allows countries to pursue peaceful

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70 *Ibid*.

71 Suzanne Maloney, *Iran's Long Reach: Iran as a Pivotal State in the Muslim World* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2008), 50.

72 Alethia H. Cook and Jalil Roshandel, *The United States and Iran: Policy Challenges and Opportunities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2009), 120.

nuclear energy programs. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a safeguard established by the treaty, conducts inspections to ensure treaty compliance.[73] In 1974, Iran displayed an interest in nuclear technology by founding the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.[74] Iran's nuclear program resumed in the mid-1980s, likely as a response to chemical weapons used by Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War.[75] Several factors may have helped accelerate Iran's nuclear program: first, Iraq's nuclear program was revealed during the 1991 Gulf War;[76] and second, after this war, the United States expanded its regional presence.[77]

Iran's choice to restart its nuclear program appears to have been motivated by a sense of insecurity and a desire to protect itself from future attacks – behavior anticipated by the theory of realism.[78] As mentioned earlier, Mearsheimer identifies survival as the fundamental driver of state behavior and a key tenet of realism.[79] Likewise, according to Ikenberry, realism's balance of power concept dictates that "security – indeed survival – is the fundamental goal of states, and because states cannot ultimately rely on

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73 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/NPT.shtml (accessed November 11, 2012).

74 Cook and Roshandel, 120.

75 Ray Takeyh, "Introduction: What Do We Know?" in *Iran: The Nuclear Challenge*, ed. Robert D. Blackwill (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2012), Kindle edition.

76 Greg Bruno, "Iran's Nuclear Program," Council on Foreign Relations, March 10, 2010, http://www.cfr.org/iran/irans-nuclear-program/p16811 (accessed April 27, 2014).

77 Monteiro, 30.

78 Additional motives for Iran's nuclear program will be discussed in chapter two.

79 Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," 10.

commitments or guarantees to ensure their security, states will be very sensitive to their relative power position."[80] Moreover, the United States' expanding regional presence likely increased Iran's feelings of insecurity, thus prompting the nation to hasten its nuclear efforts. Iran's behavior was consistent with realist expectations for a weaker state acting in a unipolar system, especially when that state feels threatened by the global hegemon.

Concerns regarding security and survival likely continued to influence Iran's nuclear program. In 2000, Iran started testing nuclear enrichment centrifuges it obtained from the A.Q. Khan network in the mid-1990s.[81] A.Q. Khan was involved with Pakistan's nuclear program and internationally distributed nuclear information and materials.[82] Iran started constructing Nantanz, its primary nuclear enrichment facility, in 2001.[83] A representative from an Iranian dissident group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), exposed Iran's nuclear program in an August 2002 press conference.[84] In 2003, Iran's facilities were inspected by the IAEA, who found weapons-grade uranium (WGU).[85] Also in 2003, Iran agreed to halt its enrichment program after

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80 *Ibid*., 8.

81 Takeyh, "Introduction: What Do We Know?" Kindle edition.

82 Cook and Roshandel, 120.

83 *Ibid*.

84 Zachary K. Johnson, "Revelations of a Secret Program," PBS Frontline World, http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/iran403/background.html (accessed November 11, 2012).

85 Cook and Roshandel, 120. According to the Federation of American Scientists, the ambiguous term "highly enriched uranium" could refer either to uranium enriched over 20 percent or to WGU (uranium enriched to 90 percent U-235 or more). For more information, see Federation of American Scientists, "Uranium Production," http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/fuelcycle/centrifuges/U_production.html (accessed March 20, 2014).

being persuaded by Britain, France, and Germany (the EU3).[86] Greg Bruno notes that this decision was spurred by international pressure directed towards Iran.[87]

According to a 2007 National Intelligence Assessment, Iran likely had a nuclear weapons program until the fall of 2003, when the program was at least partially suspended. This document also assessed "with moderate confidence" that as of mid-2007, Iran had not resumed the development of nuclear weapons.[88] However, analysis from British intelligence indicates that Iran restarted weaponization activities after pausing these efforts in 2003. Additionally, when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was elected president in 2005, the EU3-Iran agreement ended.[89] Also in 2005, Iran indicated that it was restarting uranium conversion activities.[90] According to the IAEA, in December 2011, Iran started enriching uranium at its Fordow facility.[91]

Iran's Nuclear Capabilities

In addition to Iran's uranium enrichment program, Iran has aspirations for a self-sustaining nuclear fuel cycle.[92] Iran's uranium mining facilities are located at Saghand,

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86 Takeyh, "Introduction: What Do We Know?" Kindle edition.

87 Bruno.

88 The assessment also had moderate-to-high confidence that Iran was at least "keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons." See the National Intelligence Council, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," November 2007, http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/20071203_release.pdf (accessed February 2, 2014).

89 Takeyh, "Introduction: What Do We Know?" Kindle edition.

90 Bruno.

91 Takeyh, "Introduction: What Do We Know?" Kindle edition.

92 For a diagram of the nuclear fuel cycle, see Federation of American Scientists, "Nuclear Fuel Cycle," http://www.fas.org/programs/ssp/nukes/fuelcycle/index.html (accessed March 20, 2014).

as well as the Gchine mine near Bandar Abbas. However, Iran's uranium mining efforts may not be able to sustain a commercial nuclear reactor.[93] After Iran produces uranium yellowcake via mining, it converts the yellowcake to uranium hexafluoride gas at its Uranium Conversion Facility in Isfahan.[94] Iran's Nantanz Fuel Enrichment Plant produces low-enriched uranium (LEU) hexafluoride, and the IAEA monitors the centrifuges and nuclear material at the facility.[95] According to a February 2013 IAEA report, Iran produced 8,271 kg of uranium hexafluoride enriched up to 5 percent U-235, as well as 280 kg of uranium hexafluoride enriched up to 20 percent U-235.[96] A report from the Project on U.S. Middle East Nonproliferation Strategy assessed that if Iran enriched the uranium at its Nantanz facility to WGU, it could produce more than six nuclear weapons.[97]

Since Iran possesses the ability to produce reactor fuel, it could theoretically produce WGU.[98] In a Congressional Research Service report, Paul K. Kerr expressed concern over Iran constructing uranium enrichment facilities with gas centrifuges. Gas centrifuges could produce either nuclear power reactor fuel (LEU) or highly enriched

93 Robert J. Reardon, *Containing Iran: Strategies for Addressing the Iranian Nuclear Challenge* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2012), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2012/RAND_MG1180.pdf (accessed March 20, 2014), 26-27.

94 *Ibid.,* 30.

95 *Ibid.*, 31.

96 IAEA Board of Governors, "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran," February 21, 2013, http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2013/gov2013-6.pdf (accessed March 20, 2014), 3.

97 David Albright et al, *U.S Nonproliferation Strategy for the Changing Middle East*, The Project on U.S. Middle East Nonproliferation Strategy, January 2013, http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/FinalReport.pdf (accessed March 20, 2014), 24.

98 Reardon, 26.

uranium (HEU) for nuclear weapons.[99] According to RAND's Robert J. Reardon, "Because the fuel cycle can be used for both purposes, the United States has long opposed Iran's possession of it, and has focused its efforts on denying Iran this capability."[100] Experts are also concerned that Iran might covertly construct a uranium enrichment plant.[101] Furthermore, even though the IAEA monitors Iran's declared facilities, the IAEA "is unable to provide credible assurances about the absence of undeclared nuclear material and activities in Iran, and therefore to conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is in peaceful activities."[102]

In addition to Iran's uranium enrichment program, the country has sought plutonium production capabilities. According to Reardon, Iran is not currently able to produce weapons-grade plutonium. Although a heavy water reactor under construction at Arak could produce weapons-grade plutonium, this reactor was not yet complete at the time of Reardon's assessment.[103] Iran could extract plutonium from spent fuel obtained from its Bushehr nuclear power reactor, which was constructed by Russia. Although Iran was supposed to return spent fuel to Russia, the nation has since stated that discharged

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99 U.S Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran's Nuclear Program: Status*, by Paul K. Kerr, CRS Report RL34256 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, April 3, 2013), 3.

100 Reardon, 26.

101 Albright et al., 24.

102 International Atomic Energy Agency, 12.

103 Reardon, 29, 55.

fuel is being stored at the site. While Iran is not considered currently able to reprocess the fuel, it may develop the capability to do so in the future.[104]

Iran's missile capacities are an important part of its nuclear capabilities, since Iran would deliver nuclear weapons (if it possessed them) via ballistic missiles.[105] In a U.S. Intelligence threat assessment, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper expressed concern over Iran's missile capabilities, including the possibility that Iran may want to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile: "Iran already has the largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the Middle East, and it is expanding the scale, reach, and sophistication of its ballistic missile arsenal." Furthermore, Clapper assessed Iran's ballistic missiles as being able to deliver weapons of mass destruction.[106] Similarly, a 2012 Department of Defense report stated, "Iran continues to develop ballistic missiles that can range regional adversaries, Israel, and Eastern Europe, including an extended-range variant of the Shahb-3 and a 2,000-km medium-range ballistic missile, the Ashura." The report assessed that Iran could test an intercontinental ballistic missile by 2015, if it received foreign support.[107] According to a Congressional Research Service report, U.S. intelligence reports consider Iran's medium-range ballistic missiles to be

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104 Albright et al., 56.

105 Reardon, 39.

106 James R. Clapper, *Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community*, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, March 12, 2013, http://www.intelligence.senate.gov/130312/clapper.pdf (accessed March 20, 2014), 7.

107 Department of Defense, "Annual Report on Military Power of Iran," April 2012, http://www.fas.org/man/eprint/dod-iran.pdf (accessed March 20, 2014), 1.

"inherently capable of carrying a nuclear warhead."[108] However, experts disagree about the status of Iran's missile program,[109] and some argue that U.S. assessments present worst-case scenarios.[110] Furthermore, according to Reardon, "Iran would need to overcome several technical challenges to construct a functioning implosion warhead that could be effectively mated to one of Iran's ballistic missile designs."[111] Thus, Iran's ability to actually deliver a nuclear weapon, should it produce one, remains unclear.

Iran's Nuclear Intentions

Although Iran has pursued a nuclear program for fuel purposes, the country's intentions regarding nuclear weapons have historically been difficult to assess. In 2012, Clapper indicated that Iran's intention to produce nuclear weapons was unknown, but stated that the nation possessed a high capability to produce such weapons. Thus, according to Clapper, the primary question was whether Iran intended to do so.[112] Clapper provided a similar assessment in a 2013 statement to the U.S. Senate's Committee on Armed Services. He noted that the decision to produce nuclear weapons would likely fall to Iran's supreme leader, but specified that Khamenei's intentions were

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108 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran's Ballistic Missile and Space Launch Programs*, by Steven A. Hildreth, CRS Report R42849 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, December 6, 2012), n.p.

109 Reardon, 39-40

110 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran's Ballistic Missile and Space Launch Programs*, 37.

111 Reardon, 55.

112 James R. Clapper, *Unclassified Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community*, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 31, 2012, http://intelligence.senate.gov/120131/clapper.pdf (accessed November 11, 2012), 5-6.

unknown.[113] Clapper also indicated in 2013 that even though Iran's technical capabilities have become more advanced, it "could not divert safeguarded material and produce a weapon-worth of WGU before this activity is discovered."[114]

Statements from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, when taken at face value, suggest that Iran has been uninterested in obtaining a nuclear weapon. For example, in 2012, Khamenei was quoted as stating, "The Iranian nation has never sought and will never seek nuclear weapons and will prove to the world that a nuclear weapon is not a source of power . . ."[115] In a similar, but somewhat contradictory claim, Khamenei said, "We do not have nuclear weapons, and we do not intend to produce them. But in the face of aggression, either by the U.S. or the Zionist regime, we will attack them at the same level that they attack us . . ."[116] However, a 2012 report from the IAEA challenged the validity of Khamenei's statements, which may have been attempts to conceal the country's nuclear intentions. According to the science journal *Nature*, the IAEA "report suggests that the country [Iran] is working towards a relatively sophisticated device that could fit on board a medium-range ballistic missile – making it much more difficult to intercept and destroy than one delivered by an aeroplane *[sic]*."[117] Moreover, Ray

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113 U.S. Senate, Committee on Armed Services, "Hearing to Receive Testimony on the Current and Future Worldwide Threats to the National Security of the United States," April 18, 2013, http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/13-24%20-%204-18-13.pdf (accessed February 2, 2014), 8.

114 James R. Clapper, *Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community*, 7.

115 "Iran will shatter delusions of grandeur of nuclear weapon states: Leader," *Tehran Times (Iran)*, February 22, 2012, Politics section, NewsBank, http://infoweb.newsbank.com/ (accessed December 2, 2012).

116 "Iran will respond to any attack at same level: Leader," *Tehran Times (Iran)*, March 20, 2012, Politics section, NewsBank, http://infoweb.newsbank.com/ (accessed December 2, 2012).

117 Geoff Brumfiel, "Iran's nuclear plan revealed: Report paints detailed picture of nation's intention to build a warhead," *Nature* 479 (November 17, 2011), http://www.fas.org/press/_clips/17112011-nature.pdf (accessed December 2, 2012): 282.

Takeyh asserts that according to large amounts of evidence, Iran has been deceptive about "its development of dual-use nuclear fuel cycle capabilities."[118] Thus, at the very least, the United States should consider Iran's nuclear program to be a potential security concern.

However, not all scholars consider a nuclear-armed Iran to be cause for trepidation. Drawing from realist balance of power arguments, Waltz explains that as the Middle East's sole nuclear power, Israel is the cause of regional volatility. He contends that "the current tensions are best viewed not as the early stages of a relatively recent Iranian nuclear crisis but rather as the final stages of a decades-long Middle East nuclear crisis that will end only when a balance of military power is restored."[119] Furthermore, Waltz argues that an Iranian bomb would lead to "a Middle East that is more stable than it is today."[120]

Walt, in contrast, argues that "Waltz is too sanguine about the pacifying effects of nuclear weapons in this context and . . . discounts the other risks associated with nuclear spread (including questions of custody and authority)."[121] As Walt suggests, a nuclear-armed Iran is not necessarily good for the region, nor is it beneficial for U.S. interests. A nuclear weapon could allow Iran to obtain increased legitimacy, status, and regional power. In addition, it could further the survival of a regime that opposes the United

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118 Takeyh, "Introduction: What Do We Know?" Kindle edition.

119 Kenneth N. Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 4 (July/August 2012), *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCO*host* (accessed November 14, 2012).

120 *Ibid*.

121 Stephen M. Walt, "Should we give Iran the bomb?" *Foreign Policy*, June 26, 2012, http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/06/26/waltz_weighs_in_on_iran (accessed December 3, 2012).

States and its ally Israel, and supports Hezbollah and Hamas, groups listed by the U.S. State Department as foreign terrorist organizations.[122] Furthermore, an Iranian hegemon in the Middle East would likely be a detriment to U.S. interests in the region, including the United States' energy needs. If Iran is allowed to gain power in the region, the nation may also challenge the influence of Saudi Arabia, a country with key diplomatic ties to the United States and an important source of oil. Finally, a nuclear Iran would likely impact how the United States relates to the nation on the international stage, possibly requiring the United States to treat the nation with increased deference and caution. Therefore, the United States and should work toward crafting policies designed to mitigate Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Rouhani's Election

The 2013 election of Hassan Rouhani to Iran's presidency could change the course of Iran's nuclear program.[123] Rouhani may have altered the power dynamics in Iran by influencing Iran's nuclear policy, a realm previously assessed as belonging to Khamenei. Mahmood Monshirpouri and Manochehr Dorraj argue that Rouhani disproved conventional wisdom by showing that that a president was "able to persuade ruling clerics and the Revolutionary Guards . . . to yield to a conciliatory political course."[124] In November 2013, Iran agreed to a P5+1 (United States, Russia, China,

122 U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," Bureau Of Counterterrorism, September 12, 2012, http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm (accessed December 3, 2012).

123 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Interim Agreement on Iran's Nuclear Program*, by Kenneth Katzman and Paul K. Kerr, CRS Report R43333 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, December 11, 2013), 1.

124 Mahmood Monshirpouri and Maanochehr Dorraj, "Iran's Foreign Policy: A Shifting Strategic Landscape," *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 4 (winter 2013): 134.

Germany, Britain and France) six-month interim agreement, which would ease certain international sanctions directed toward Iran if the nation froze various elements of its nuclear program. Meanwhile, the ultimate goal remains a comprehensive, long-term agreement between Iran and the P5+1.[125] While the results of these negotiations have yet to be seen, the interim agreement represents a positive step in U.S.-Iran relations. The multilateral nature of these negotiations is also promising. As liberal theory suggests, the United States should seek to act multilaterally whenever possible, as this can provide the United States with increased legitimacy and effectiveness.[126] Thomas G. Weiss asserts, "By renewing multilateral leadership, the United States can more effectively pursue its own interests while helping lay the foundations for future efforts to address global problems and help others."[127]

In addition, Rouhani's apparent willingness to negotiate could indicate that Iran currently considers the economic promise of sanctions relief, rather than the security and prestige associated with nuclear weapons, to be the best way of furthering its interests. According to liberal theory, states act to preserve their own interests, but perceptions of these interests can shift over time. Robert Keohane argues that liberalism "does not accept a static view of self-interest, but rather holds open the possibility that people will change their attitudes and loyalties."[128]

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125 U.S. Library of Congress, *Interim Agreement on Iran's Nuclear Program*, n.p. Multilateral negotiations with Iran are not a new development, but have taken place since 2003.

126 Thomas G. Weiss, "Renewing Washington's Multilateral Leadership," *Global Governance* 18, no. 3 (July 2012): 254.

127 *Ibid.*, 256

128 Keohane, "International Liberalism Reconsidered," 51.

Even if negotiations fail, the worst-case scenario – nuclear weapon use by Iran – is unlikely to occur. As Waltz contends, Iran's attainment of a nuclear weapon will not likely be catastrophic to the region, as the nation would likely act rationally with such a weapon.[129] If Iran is a rational actor, Iran will not likely use nuclear weapons offensively except in cases of regime survival or as a last resort. However, the United States should continue to pursue policies designed to prevent Iran from developing such weapons, since such a weapon would likely enhance Iran's international standing.

Policy Options

In order to deter Iran's nuclear ambitions, the United States should continue its attempts to slow or halt the nation's nuclear program. Scholars disagree on which policy or combination of policies the United States should adopt to achieve this objective. Most scholars tend to argue that the United States should adopt traditional diplomacy, public diplomacy, or sanctions toward Iran. Other scholars avoid policy recommendations, but instead focus on the ineffectiveness of one or more policy options. These scholars tend to argue that there is no solution to Iran's nuclear ambitions. Given the recent nuclear talks with Iran, these scholars may have been unnecessarily pessimistic. However, the results of these negotiations are unforeseen, and Iran may still choose to carry out secret activities in defiance of an international agreement. Conspicuously absent from many scholars' recommendations is the military option; scholars seem to agree that U.S. military force against Iran is either unadvisable or should only be used as a last resort.

129 Waltz, "Why Iran Should Get the Bomb."

Traditional Diplomacy

Some scholars argue that the United States should pursue diplomacy toward Iran. Diplomacy can be thought of as having two parts. In traditional diplomacy, governments interact with one another; whereas in public diplomacy, governments execute programs aimed at foreign populations.[130] President Obama's initial diplomatic policies toward Iran[131] can be characterized as attempts at traditional diplomacy. During his presidential campaign, Obama expressed a willingness to meet with Iranian leadership. He compared his stance, which he called "toughminded diplomacy," with that of Ronald Reagan and Harry Truman.[132] However, Obama's policies shifted to sanctions after Iran refused to negotiate on its nuclear program under the leadership of former president Ahmadinejad.[133] Obama's approach changed again after the election of President Rouhani, and he even chose to speak to Rouhani over the phone on September 27, 2013. This unprecedented conversation was the first of its kind since the Islamic Revolution was founded in 1979.[134]

Suzanne Maloney, whose article was written prior to Obama's latest policy change in 2013, criticizes the Obama administration's shift from diplomacy to sanctions.

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130 Walter R. Roberts, "What is Public Diplomacy? Past Practices, Present Conduct, Possible Future," Mediterranean Quarterly 18, no. 4 (2007), 45.

131 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman., CRS Report RS20871 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, June 15, 2012), 63.

132 Suzanne Maloney, "Sanctioning Iran: If Only It Were So Simple," *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 2010): 132.

133 U.S. Library of Congress, *Iran Sanctions*, June 15, 2012, 63.

134 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, by Kenneth Katzman, CRS Report RL32048 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, November 2013), n.p.

Maloney asserts that unrest associated with the Iranian presidential election in 2009 "did not formally derail the new administration's diplomacy toward Tehran, but it surely shattered any expectations for quickly and durably ending the estrangement or resolving the increasingly urgent international concerns about Iran's nuclear ambitions."[135] Maloney further explains that economic pressure, while possibly useful in convincing Iran to engage in talks, failed to alter Iran's security policies.[136] She argues that Obama's administration must pursue diplomacy in order to keep Iran from becoming a nuclear power.[137] Similarly, Nihat Ali Ozcan and Ozgur Ozdamar assert that the United States should use diplomatic engagement with Iran as a way to halt Iran's nuclear program.[138] Mir H. Sadat and James P. Hughes contend that the United States should engage Iran on the topic of Afghanistan.[139] To accomplish this, they recommend allowing direct diplomatic engagement with Iran, facilitating talks between both countries' Kabul-based ambassadors,[140] and including Iran in Afghanistan-related forums.[141]

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135 Maloney, "Sanctioning Iran: If Only It Were So Simple," 131.

136 *Ibid.*, 131-132.

137 *Ibid.*, 146.

138 Nihat Ali Ozcan and Ozgur Ozdamar, "Iran's Nuclear Program and the Future of U.S.-Iranian Relations," *Middle East Policy* 16, no. 1 (spring 2009): 132.

139 Mir H. Sadat and James P. Hughes, "U.S.-Iran Engagement Through Afghanistan," *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 1 (spring 2010): 40-41.

140 *Ibid.*, 44.

141 *Ibid.*, 45.

Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh believe Iran poses significant security threats to the United States.[142] However, they think policies aimed at containing Iran will lead to increased Sunni extremism, much like what occurred after the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon, when extreme Salafi Muslims rallied in response to Hezbollah's rise. Sunni extremism, they assert, is the undesirable "ideological barrier" to Shia Iran, much like democracy and capitalism were counterparts to Cold War communism.[143] Instead, Nasr and Takeyh argue for what they call "creative diplomacy" with Iran,[144] in which Iran would be integrated into a new regional framework. Nasr and Takeyh see Iran as a nation wanting to rise in power in its region, and as such, contend that Washington should "create a situation in which Iran will find benefit in limiting its ambitions and abiding by international norms. Dialogue, compromise, and commerce, as difficult as they may be, are convincing means."[145] Nasr and Takeyh assert that if the United States and Iran restore economic and diplomatic relations and work together on Iraq, Iran may eventually submit to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.[146]

This thesis argues that the United States should continue attempts to engage Iran as part of a multi-policy strategy designed to slow or halt Iran's nuclear program. Engagement was less likely to succeed while Iran was under the leadership of former

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142 Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh, "The Costs of Containing Iran: Washington's Misguided New Middle East Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 1 (Jan-Feb. 2008): 88.

143 *Ibid.*, 91.

144 *Ibid.*, 88.

145 *Ibid.*, 92.

146 *Ibid.*

president Mahmood Ahmadinejad, who enjoyed attracting the attention of the Arab world by employing vitriolic rhetoric about the United States and Israel. However, Rouhani's administration has shown openness towards dialogue and negotiation. Rouhani is no stranger to negotiations; from 2003 to 2005, he served as chief nuclear negotiator during the time Iran agreed to a uranium enrichment freeze. However, Rouhani's presidency should not be heralded as a definite end to the threat of Iran's nuclear program. According to a Congressional Research Service Report, Rouhani "is believed amenable to a nuclear deal with the international community that would reduce international sanctions but not necessarily preclude any options for Iran's nuclear program over the long term." Additionally, U.S. policymakers should realize that Rouhani is a political insider who has held various positions within Iran's government.[147] Thus, the United States should exercise diplomacy toward the Rouhani administration, but with caution.

As the United States engages in negotiations with Iran, it should consider the drivers behind Iran's nuclear program – namely, security and prestige – and determine how the United States could help Iran obtain these objectives through alternate means. G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter recommend: "To the extent that Iranian behavior is driven or shaped by a sense of insecurity, the United States should be willing to offer Iran assurances that assuage its legitimate fears."[148] For instance, if Iran pledges not to develop nuclear weapons and allows the IAEA to verify such a promise, the United

147 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, November 2013, 12.

148 G. John Ikenberry and Anne-Marie Slaughter, *Forging A World of Liberty Under Law: U.S. National Security In The 21st Century* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2006), 36.

States could promise not to attack Iran unless it was countering Iranian military aggression.[149]

Some scholars disagree with the traditional diplomacy option, arguing it could hurt democracy efforts in Iran. Shahram Akbarzadeh argues that a policy of engagement with Iran risks undermining U.S. support of human rights and democracy. According to Akbarzadeh, Obama's efforts to engage Iran undercut democracy, the United States' long-term goal for the Middle East region.[150] Akbarzadeh explains that engagement attempts by Obama's administration "appeared to be sanctioning the incumbent regime in Iran and turning its back on the democratic aspirations of Iranian reformers and demonstrators."[151] Although engagement may make pro-democracy efforts in Iran more difficult, the United States could adopt a policy of engagement that objects to hardline Iranian politics and encourages moderation within the context of the current regime.

Furthermore, Akbarzadeh's analysis, which appears to be informed by liberalism, may exaggerate the United States' emphasis on democracy in foreign policy. Even though the United States may claim to want democracy for the Middle East, in practice, it has supported undemocratic governments, including Saudi Arabia and Mubarak's Egypt. This indicates that the United States is interested in democracy for countries that are unfriendly, but in maintaining the status quo with friendly, non-democratic Middle Eastern nations. Thus, it seems that an Iran governed by friendlier, less belligerent

149 *Ibid.*, 36.

150 Akbarzadeh, 470.

151 *Ibid.*, 479.

leadership could be acceptable to the United States, even if it maintains its current structure.

Soft Power and Public Diplomacy

The United States could also use public diplomacy to influence the nature of the current Iranian regime. Roberts defines public diplomacy as "governmental or governmentally funded foreign policy activity. Its objective is to create, for a given country, as positive a climate as possible among foreign publics in order to facilitate the explanation and hopefully acceptance of its foreign policy."[152] U.S. interest in promoting democracy, as well as the use of public diplomacy, could be seen as having roots in liberal thought. For example, Snyder sees liberalism as influencing George W. Bush's policies aimed at establishing Middle Eastern liberal democracies.[153] Ikenberry and Kupchan, who describe their theoretical beliefs as "liberal realism," advocate for a measured use of public diplomacy by arguing that "in general, the United States should continue to encourage and facilitate the promotion of democracy abroad, but it must realize that durable liberalization must come from within and not be imposed from the outside."[154]

Joseph Nye identifies three elements of public diplomacy. First, daily communication aimed at foreign media outlets should seek to provide a framework for policies, so harmful policy misinterpretations can be avoided.[155] Second, countries

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152 Roberts, 45.

153 Snyder.

154 Ikenberry and Kupchan, 42.

155 Joseph S. Nye, Jr. "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics," (Cambridge: PublicAffairs, 2004), 108.

should employ strategic communication to further policies or ideas. Third, countries should use programs such as seminars, scholarships, and exchanges to foster relationships with foreign publics.[156] Public diplomacy can be considered a form of soft power.[157] According to Nye, soft power "co-ops people rather than coerces them. Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others."[158] In contrast, "hard power can rest on inducements ('carrots') or threats ('sticks')."[159]

Detailed information about U.S. public diplomacy initiatives in Iran is difficult to obtain. The State Department has supported programs that advance democracy, but it does not identify recipients of these funds. A portion of this money has been devoted to Iran via public diplomacy, broadcasts, and exchange efforts. Under George W. Bush, the United States worked to alter the nature of the Iranian regime by supporting pro-democracy activists in Iran. The 2006 Iran Freedom Support Act allocated an unspecified amount of money for pro-democracy efforts in Iran. Under President Obama, funding has been requested for Near East regional democracy programs, but Iran was not specified. According to the Congressional Research Service, specific information regarding fund use is sensitive. The Obama administration has emphasized connecting with Iranians via non-controversial issues such as the environment, health care, and science. Nonetheless, funds supporting Iranian human rights activists, journalists, and Iranian visits to the United States were given less importance in 2009. In addition, the

156 *Ibid.*, 108-109.

157 *Ibid.*, 107.

158 *Ibid.*, 5.

159 *Ibid.*

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center at Yale University, which recorded Iranian human rights violations, was defunded by the State Department in 2009. Some experts criticized this move. Furthermore, experts have argued for the expansion of pro-democracy programs in Iran, contending that the Green Movement proved their efficacy.[160]

The Green Movement, a term used to describe the protests associated with to the 2009 Iranian presidential election, was possibly a missed opportunity for the United States to exercise soft power and public diplomacy. Although Ahmadinejad asserted that the election results favored him over his opponent, Mir Hussein Mousavi,[161] research indicates that this election may have been rigged.[162] Mark Lagon argues that Obama chose to ignore the Green Movement in favor of possibly engaging with Ahmadinejad on the nuclear issue.[163] According to Lagon, Obama ignored the option to exercise soft power, which could have enhanced the Green Movement and furthered U.S. interests. He contends:

> . . . failing to clearly side with Ahmadinejad's opposition in 2009 represented a serious loss of US credibility. . . . By supporting the opposition in Iran through soft power, the administration would not only have associated the US with the

160 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, by Kenneth Katzman, CRS Report RL32048 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, September 5, 2012), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32048.pdf (accessed December 1, 2012), 71-72.

161 Mark P. Lagon, "The Value of Values: Soft Power Under Obama," *World Affairs* (September/October 2011): 70-71.

162 For analysis of these election results, see Daniel Berman and Thomas Rintoul, "Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran's 2009 Presidential Election," ed. Ali Ansari, Chatham House and the Institute of Iranian Studies, University of St. Andrews, http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Middle%20East/iranelection0609.pdf (accessed December 1, 2012). This study highlights a number of problems associated with the election, including results that indicated some provinces had over 100 percent voter turnout.

163 Lagon, 71.

> aspirations of the people in the streets of Tehran but also advanced the objective of dislodging a potentially nuclear rogue state.[164]

However, U.S. support of the opposition could have provided the regime with an additional reason to suppress dissidents. Thus, public diplomacy should be used with caution.

Shahram Chubin also stresses the use of public diplomacy, under which the United States would communicate its support of human rights, democracy, and rule of law to the Iranian people.[165] Although Chubin praises the Obama administration's attempt to engage Iran as "courageous," he argues Iran has not displayed a willingness to submit to inspections or significantly suspend its nuclear program. Chubin also maintains, "Disclaimers notwithstanding, the decision to negotiate with Iran today inevitably confers a degree of recognition on the regime . . . "[166] In addition, Chubin asserts that no consensus exists on the nuclear issue in Iran,[167] and he contends that moderate Iranians could promote tolerance, plurality, responsibility, and openness in their country's government.[168] Chubin's emphasis on the value of moderate Iranians should be integrated into the United States' public diplomacy strategy toward Iran. However, his analysis may no longer apply to the current regime in Iran. Furthermore, unlike Chubin suggests, the United States need not view engagement and public diplomacy as mutually

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164 *Ibid.*, 71-72.

165 Shahram Chubin, "The Iranian Nuclear Riddle after June 12," *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (January 2010): 164, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/10jan_Chubin.pdf (accessed December 2, 2012).

166 *Ibid.*, 169.

167 *Ibid.*, 166.

168 *Ibid.*, 164.

exclusive. The United States can negotiate while simultaneously maintaining that a nation's belligerent behavior is unacceptable.

RAND scholars Keith Crane, Rollie Lal and Jeffrey Martini argue that the United States should increase public diplomacy initiatives.[169] These scholars, who think democracy will probably expand in Iran, argue that the relationship between Iran and the United States could improve if Iranians obtained more freedom. They explain:

> Broadly speaking, the U.S. government has the opportunities to encourage Iranians, including members of ethnic groups, to push for expanded civil liberties and democratic practices in Iran. The United States also has the ability to encourage policy change in Iran that would liberalize the economy, thereby possibly strengthening nongovernmental actors.[170]

However, Crane, Lal, and Martini caution that short-term gains from this approach will likely be small. Furthermore, given the tensions between the United States and Iran, policies toward Iran must be skillfully executed.[171] Despite their emphasis on public diplomacy, Crane, Lal, and Martini do not advocate for regime change efforts. They caution that ". . . U.S. actions directed toward regime change in Iran are likely to backfire. When facing criticism from the United States, which many Iranians view as complicit in the problems of the Iranian political system, Iranian citizens largely rally around the regime."[172]

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169 Keith Crane, Rollie Lal, Jeffrey Martini, *Iran's Political, Demographic, and Economic Vulnerabilities* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2008), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG693.pdf (accessed December 2, 2012), 113.

170 *Ibid.*, xix.

171 *Ibid.*

172 *Ibid.*, 33.

In particular, these scholars argue that the United States should increase public diplomacy toward Iran by expanding educational exchanges, increasing local language radio broadcasts, and urging individuals such as U.S. officials to interact with Iran's media.[173] Crane, Lale, and Martini argue that U.S. public diplomacy should seek to influence ethnic minorities in Iran, such as the Turkmen, Kurds, Azeris, Baluch, and Arabs.[174] Non-Persians make up a sizeable portion of Iran's demographics, as only half of Iran's population is of Persian ethnicity. Despite Iran's emphasis of Shia Islam as a common denominator amongst its population, ethnic cleavages still exist regarding government job allocation, language usage, and oil revenue sharing. The RAND monograph asserted that non-Persians in Iran, who widely backed prior reformist president Mohammad Khatami, "are likely to play a significant role in moving the country toward a more-democratic system."[175] Therefore, U.S. public diplomacy efforts should support radio broadcasts in languages spoken by ethnic minorities.[176]

A RAND report authored by Sara Beth Elson and Alireza Nader suggests that the United States should provide broadcasts to Iran, as well as technology that enables Iranian Internet users to circumvent filters.[177] Elson and Nader argue that the stagnant relationship between the United States and Iran has been "partially due to the mutual

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173 *Ibid.*, xix-xx.

174 *Ibid.*, 113.

175 *Ibid.*, xv.

176 *Ibid.*, 113.

177 Sara Beth Elson and Alireza Nader, *What Do Iranians Think? A Survey of Attitudes on the United States, the Nuclear Program, and the Economy* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2011/RAND_TR910.pdf (accessed December 2, 2012), xii.

unawareness caused by the absence of official and cultural ties between the two nations. . . . Iranians lack sufficient information to judge the United States and its policies; more importantly, they lack a variety of sources for obtaining information."[178]

Currently, public diplomacy toward Iran appears to be a neglected tool in the U.S. policy arsenal. The Green Movement implies the existence of a group of moderate Iranians who may be open to U.S. public diplomacy efforts. Thus, the United States should expand public diplomacy efforts toward Iran by informing Iranians about U.S. values and policies, and by encouraging moderate Iranians to have a voice and counteract hardline politics. Public diplomacy can empower moderate Iranians to continue seeking change for their nation. Finally, United States should pursue public diplomacy in conjunction with traditional diplomacy. By avoiding a message of regime change, the United States can employ both policy options while avoiding a contradictory posture toward Iran.

Public diplomacy without the component of regime change seems counterintuitive when considering liberalism's democratic peace theory, which asserts that democratic nations are less likely to attack one another. Under this concept, the United States would seemingly want to install a liberal democracy in Iran, as this type of government would no longer pose a threat to the United States or other democratic nations. However, as realism and suggests, the United States' soft power must be used judiciously to avoid provoking other nations to engage in balancing. As Ikenberry and Slaughter argue, by "using our status as the sole superpower . . . to try to unilaterally transform the domestic politics of other states, we have triggered a backlash that increases extreme anti-

178 *Ibid.*, 29.

Americanism, discourages key actors from fully cooperating with us, and weakens our global authority."[179] To ensure that the United States uses its power in a measured fashion, U.S. public diplomacy efforts should be conducted prudently and without a message of regime change.

Sanctions

Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, and Kimberly Ann Elliott define sanctions as "the deliberate, government-inspired withdrawal, or threats of withdrawal, of customary trade or financial relations."[180] The United States' policy toward Iran has featured a mixture of sanctions, including some aimed at hampering Iran's nuclear program.[181] Dana H. Allin and Steven consider sanctions to often be harmful and merely symbolic. Yet, they argue that sanctions may be necessary "to indicate international disapproval of Iran's behaviour *[sic]*, and to reassure Israel that the problem is not forgotten."[182] Daniel W. Drezner's work, which focuses on the use of carrots or incentives in foreign policy, concludes that economic or military coercive measures are often preferable to incentives.[183] Drezner argues that carrots are costly when successful,

179 Ikenberry and Slaughter, 13.

180 Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, and Kimberly Ann Elliott, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, November 1990), 2.

181 Lynn E. Davis et al., *Iran's Nuclear Future: Critical U.S. Policy Choices* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1087.pdf (accessed December 2, 2012), 22.

182 Dana H. Allin and Steven Simon, "Obama's Dilemma: Iran, Israel and the Rumours of War," *Survival* 52, no. 6 (December 2010-January 2011): 37.

183 Daniel W. Drezner, "The Trouble with Carrots: Transaction Costs, Conflict Expectations, and Economic Inducements," *Security Studies* 9, no. 1-2 (1999): 217.

but threats of coercion are costly when unsuccessful. Therefore, he considers sanctions to be less costly than incentives.[184]

Although the United States' policy has emphasized sanctions toward Iran, broader research regarding sanctions casts doubts on their effectiveness. For example, Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott's extensive monograph evaluates economic sanctions by looking at 116 cases via a chart, and 11 cases in more detail.[185] The study concludes with the following: "Although it is not true that sanctions 'never work,' they are of limited utility in achieving foreign policy goals that depend on compelling the target country to take actions it stoutly resists."[186] The authors assess that sanctions have worked in some cases, especially when they are aimed toward small countries and involve more limited policy objectives.[187] However, the authors assert that sanctions intended to affect major policy changes or foreign military capacities were usually not effective.[188] If this study's results hold true, sanctions seem unlikely to impede Iran's nuclear program.

However, sanctions may have led to Rouhani's election and incentivized Iran's participation in nuclear negotiations. For instance, a Congressional Research Study report argued that Rouhani's election was "an indication of the growing public pressure on the regime to achieve an easing of sanctions."[189] While nuclear talks with Iran may

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184 *Ibid.*, 200.

185 Hufbauer, Schott, and Elliott, 2.

186 *Ibid.*, 92.

187 *Ibid*.

188 *Ibid.*, 92-93.

189 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman, CRS Report RS20871 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, January 15, 2014), n.p

prove unproductive, any form of engagement could lead to results, and as such, is preferable to the former stalemate between the United States and Iran. Nonetheless, the United States should not cease all sanctions unless a favorable, verifiable agreement is reached to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

Meanwhile, as liberal theory suggests, the United States should continue promoting multilateral sanctions by working within the context of international institutions, as such behavior will likely buttress U.S. legitimacy and have more success than unilateral sanctions. For example, in June 2010, U.S. efforts helped ensure the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929, which levied comprehensive sanctions towards Iran. Additionally, the United States has leveraged its alliances with Canada, Australia, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and the European Union, to direct additional pressure towards Iran.[190]

Pessimist Approach

Some scholars assert that no solution exists to Iran's nuclear ambitions. Donette Murray, for instance, offers a pessimistic analysis of past U.S. policies toward Iran. Murray discusses the United States' history of using containment toward Iran, which occurred during the presidential administrations of Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, and George W. Bush. According to Murray, sanctions were unable to keep Iran from obtaining items related to its nuclear ambitions. In addition, she notes the difficulty of pursuing engagement with Iran.[191] She explains there was "a tension between

190 Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: Sanctions Related to Iran," The White House, July 31, 2012, http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/07/31/fact-sheet-sanctions-related-iran (accessed April 29, 2014).

191 Donette Murray, "The carcass of dead policies: lessons for Obama in dealing with Iran," *Contemporary Politics* 16, no. 2 (June 2010): 217.

incremental versus substantive talks and a debilitating anxiety over how to get the balance right when attempting to reach out."[192] Comprehensive talks were problematic because they involved addressing difficult topics, including zero-sum gain issues such as nuclear weapons.[193] Finally, Murray questions whether any U.S. action can change important aspects of Iran's behavior.[194] Similarly, Volker Perthes suggests there is no solution for Iran's nuclear pursuits. He recommends engaging Iran on other issues, such as Afghanistan.[195] Although these scholars present compelling arguments, given U.S. interests in the region, the United States should endeavor to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, even if the chance of success is low. Moreover, recent developments indicate that these scholars may have been too pessimistic about U.S. engagement with Iran.

Combined Approach

James Dobbins, special envoy to Afghanistan under George W. Bush, suggests that both sanctions and negotiations can be used toward Iran. He explains: "Obama has said that he is not willing to negotiate indefinitely and that if Iran does not move soon on the central issues of its nuclear program, the United States will seek additional sanctions. This is a false dichotomy. Sanctions and negotiations are not alternatives . . ."[196]

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192 *Ibid.*, 218.

193 *Ibid*.

194 *Ibid*., 221.

195 Volker Perthes, "Ambition and Fear: Iran's Foreign Policy and Nuclear Programme," *Survival* 52, no. 3 (June-July 2010): 111.

196 James Dobbins, "Negotiating with Iran: Reflections from Personal Experience," *The Washington Quarterly 3*3, no. 1 (January 2010): 161-162.

According to Dobbins, engagement can be useful even when it fails, as it can increase information and lead to improved policy.[197] Dobbins' arguments for a combined approach are compelling and should be seriously considered by U.S. policymakers, especially since sanctions and engagement appear to be currently working together in an effective manner.

Conclusion

Iran's nuclear ambitions have posed a significant challenge for the United States. Iran's past attempts to conceal its nuclear program, combined with its uranium enrichment efforts, suggest that Iran could have the capacity to develop a nuclear weapon. Historically, Iran's nuclear program appears to have been motivated by a sense of insecurity, along with the desire to balance against a growing U.S. power in the region. Iran's intentions regarding developing a nuclear weapon are more difficult to assess. Due to the predominantly rational nature of the Iranian regime, if Iran did develop a nuclear weapon, it is unlikely to use such a weapon in an offensive capacity. Nonetheless, realist scholars like Waltz seem too optimistic about nuclear weapons proliferation. Given that nuclear weapons equal increased power in the international sphere, the United States has an interest in preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear capabilities.

U.S. interests dictate that the United States should attempt to slow or halt Iran's nuclear ambitions. Upon examination, all possible policy options come with advantages and disadvantages. Engagement with the current Iranian regime, which may possibly provide an opportunity for accommodation, information gathering, and reintegration of Iran into a new regional framework, risks harming democracy efforts in Iran. Diplomatic

197 *Ibid.*, 161.

talks may also be seen as a U.S. endorsement of Iran's non-liberal regime. Public diplomacy, which may encourage democracy efforts in Iran, may harm U.S. attempts to engage the current regime. Although sanctions are a way to demonstrate U.S. disapproval of Iran, they statistically have a low chance of success.

However, the United States must still attempt to mitigate security risks cause by Iran's nuclear program. The United States will be best served by adopting a multi-policy approach toward Iran. As demonstrated by a review of literature on this topic, many scholars create false dichotomies amongst policy options. In contrast, a multi-policy approach can be consistently implemented if all three policies work toward a common goal: moderating Iran's leadership without seeking regime change. First, the United States should seek to employ traditional diplomacy by continuing to participate in multilateral talks regarding Iran's nuclear program. While participating in these talks, the United States should attempt to address the drivers behind an Iranian nuclear program, such as prestige and security. If the United States is able to address these concerns through alternate means, talks with Iran are more likely to succeed. Additionally, the United States should use the carrot of sanctions relief to influence Iran during negotiations.

Second, the United States should expand public diplomacy initiatives toward Iran through programs such as educational exchanges, broadcasts, and engagement with the Iranian media. Expanding these efforts would be a change to current U.S. policy. U.S. public diplomacy efforts should seek to inform Iranians about U.S. policy and foster an understanding between the two countries' publics. Public diplomacy should seek to empower dissatisfied Iranians, such as those who participated in the Green Movement, by

encouraging them to advocate for a moderate government. However, public diplomacy efforts must be undertaken judiciously and should not aim to induce regime change. Finally, the United States should continue using sanctions unless a successful nuclear deal is reached. The United States should continue to leverage alliances and international institutions by advocating for multilateral sanctions, which will likely be more successful than unilateral sanctions. These policies provide the best chance of halting or at least slowing Iran's nuclear program. Simultaneously, these policies help promote the responsible use of U.S. power and, as such, help fortify the United States' role as the world's hegemon.

Chapter 2: Iran's Shia Identity and its Regional Foreign Policy

"Do you know the difference between a Sunni and a Shiite?" *New York Times* reporter Jeff Stein asked this question to a variety of high-ranking officials, including distinguished individuals from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and congressional intelligence committees. The results were not impressive. Many officials had no concept of the Sunni-Shia split or what countries adhered to which version of Islam. For instance, FBI chief of national security Willie Hulon erroneously stated that Iran was Sunni, even though he correctly identified al Qaeda as Sunni.[198] These results indicate a need for U.S. policymakers to understand the Sunni-Shia split and how it influences Middle Eastern politics. It is especially important for policymakers to understand how Shia dynamics impact the behavior of Iran, a country where 90 percent of its 70 million people are Shia Muslim.[199] The historical challenges associated with U.S.-Iran relations only increase this need.

This chapter seeks to understand how Iran's identity as a Shia nation influences its behavior as a regional actor in the Middle East. To accomplish this, the chapter will provide a brief background on the Sunni-Shia split. Next, to better understand Iran's foreign policymaking, the chapter will examine the region through the framework offered by the international relations theories of neorealism and constructivism. This section asserts that both neorealism and constructivism can help explain the dynamics present in the Middle East. Neorealism's emphasis on state behavior, however, fails to account for non-state actors and ethnic cleavages, both of which play an important role in the region.

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198 Stein.

199 Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 212.

Constructivism highlights the important role of identity in the region, but provides less guidance on how to understand state intentions. This section also argues that neorealism's balance of power concept, if modified, could help explain the role of non-state actors and Sunni/Shia dynamics in the Middle East.

Subsequently, the chapter examines how Iran's Shia identity informs major aspects of its regional foreign policy posture. First, this section defines the concept of pragmatism and argues that tensions between ideology and pragmatism have existed throughout Iranian history. Second, it analyzes Iran's geopolitical concerns associated with the nation's hegemonic aspirations and relationship with Iraq. Third, it considers Iran's security concerns by examining Iranian nuclear ambitions. Fourth, it looks at Iran's support of non-state actors. This section argues that although Iran's religious identity is Shia, the nation's regional policy choices seem to be primarily based on pragmatic concerns for influence and self-preservation. Shia beliefs and ideological motivators may also play a role in Iranian foreign policy, but their impact remains secondary to pragmatism. Iran's Shia identity does, however, impact the perception other Muslim-majority nations have of Iran. While Iran's Shia identity may help Iran build relationships with other Shia communities, it may also hinder Iran's relations with Sunni nations. Thus, Iran appears to either downplay or highlight its Shia identity depending on expediency.

The Sunni-Shia Split

The Sunni-Shia division was initially caused by a disagreement regarding who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad after his death. The Shia contended that Muhammad's family members were the rightful leaders of the Muslims. In contrast,

Sunni Muslims thought that the Prophet's successor only needed to be an able leader and commendable Muslim.[200] Adherents of Shia Islam believe that spiritual authority is vested in the descendents of the Prophet Muhammad through the line of his cousin and son-in-law, Ali. These leaders or descendents are called the *imamate*. In "Twelver" Shia Islam, which most Shia adhere to, Shias believe there were twelve Imams in history. The last imam is considered the "Hidden Imam," and at the present, he is spiritually occulted. However, this imam will come back as a redeemer-type figure called the Mahdi.[201]

Iran's current system of government is centered on a concept developed by the deceased Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini: *velayat-e faqih*. Shias historically have contended that after the twelfth Imam or Mahdi disappeared, the political authority of the Imams was suspended. However, Khomeini asserted that the clerics have the political authority to rule during the Mahdi's occultation, and if a jurist decides to form a government, other jurists are obligated to follow. This idea goes against Shia tradition, since no jurist has traditionally been considered to hold authority over another. Furthermore, the leading Shia jurists, called *marja' al-taqlid*, especially did not hold preeminence over one another.[202]

Vali Nasr explains the differences between the two sects as follows: "Shiism and Sunnism not only understand Islamic history, theology, and law differently, but each breathes a distinct ethos of faith and piety that nurtures a particular temperament and a

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200 *Ibid.*, 35-37.

201 Mandaville, 26-40.

202 Arjomand, 22.

unique approach to the question of what it means to be Muslim."[203] Approximately 10 to 15 percent or 130 to 195 million Muslims adhere to Shia Islam. The Shia communities in Iran and Iraq comprise over half of the world's Shia. Other sizable Shia populations are located in Pakistan, Lebanon, India, Bangladesh, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. The Sunni-Shia split has important political ramifications for the Muslim world,[204] including Iran's regional policy decisions.

Understanding the Middle Eastern Region: Neorealism and Constructivism

Neorealism or structural realism, a subset of the international relations theory of realism, offers insights that can help explain Middle Eastern power dynamics and provide a framework for interpreting Iran's regional posture. Stephen M. Walt summarizes Kenneth N. Waltz's version of neorealism:

> For Waltz, the international system consisted of a number of great powers, each seeking to survive. Because the system is anarchic (i.e., there is no central authority to protect states from one another), each state has to survive on its own. Waltz argued that this condition would lead weaker states to balance against, rather than bandwagon with, more powerful rivals.[205]

This theory's emphasis on anarchy and insecurity seems to align with realities present in the region, including rampant conflict and war.[206] Additionally, neorealism's balance of power concept could help explain the behavior of states in the region. Waltz provides the

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203 Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 34.

204 Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 40.

205 Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," 31.

206 Raymond Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (New York, Manchester University Press, 2003), 1.

following explanation of the concept: "Unbalanced power, whoever wields it, is a potential danger to others. . . . Some of the weaker states in the system will therefore act to restore a balance and thus move the system back to bi- or multipolarity."[207] Although the balance of power concept focuses primarily on the international sphere,[208] the idea could also be applied at a regional level.

However, neorealism's sole emphasis on state behavior precludes the possibility that other forces could provide balance within an international or regional system. Neorealist scholar John J. Mearsheimer admits that because realism focuses on states, non-state actors such as al Qaeda do not fit into the theory. However, he argues that realism cannot be adjusted to account for terrorist groups, because this would dilute the theory.[209] Nonetheless, he asserts that "Al-Qaeda operates within the state system, which operates according to realist logic. . . . Still, there are limits to what realism can tell us about Al-Qaeda, because it is a non-state actor, and there is no room for non-state actors in structural realism."[210]

Moreover, Steve Yetiv writes that the balance of power theory "does not allow for balancing behavior that is motivated by factors such as ideological preferences, the internal characteristics of states, the type of government, the quality of decision making,

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207 Kenneth N. Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 4 (December 1997): 915-916.

208 Steve Yetiv, "The Travails of Balance of Power Theory: The United States in the Middle East," *Security Studies* 15, no. 1 (January-March 2006): 72.

209 "Conversations in International Relations: Interview with John J. Mearsheimer (Part II)," *International Relations* 20, no. 2 (2006), http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0041.pdf (accessed February 16, 2014), 235.

210 *Ibid.*, 235.

or particular features of their leaders."[211] The balance of power theory fails to consider these factors because neorealism assumes that state interests are universal and unchanging. Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett argue that "little doubt exists that during the last two decades many scholars working in the systemic tradition assumed that the homogeneity of state interest was a logical starting point.[212]

In contrast, the international relations theory[213] of constructivism contends that identity can influence state behavior.[214] According to Alexander Wendt, constructivism emphasizes: "(1) that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and (2) that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature."[215] Constructivism recognizes that factors such as religion, ethnicity, language, and culture form the foundation of group identities.[216] Although realism cannot explain supra-state ideologies that lead to conflict, such as Zionism, Islamic fundamentalism, and Pan Arabism,[217] constructivism can help explain the influence of such ideologies.[218]

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211 Yetiv, 72.

212 Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, "Introduction: Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East," in *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East,* ed. Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, 1-25 (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2002), 2-3.

213 Anne-Marie Slaughter contends that constructivism is an "ontology," not an international relations theory. See Anne-Marie Slaughter, "International Relations, Principal Theories," http://www.princeton.edu/~slaughtr/Articles/722_IntlRelPrincipalTheories_Slaughter_20110509zG.pdf (accessed April 29, 2014).

214 Walt, "International Relations: One World, Many Theories," 41.

215 Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

216 *Ibid.*, 210

217 Benjamin Miller, "Balance of Power or the State-to-Nation Balance: Explaining Middle East War-Propensity," *Security Studies* 15, no. 4 (October-December 2006): 664.

Additionally, while neorealism claims that conflict in the Middle East is related to the anarchic nature of the international system, constructivism can help explain other sources of this conflict, including imperialism, the Israel-Palestine issue, oil, and subjective borders.[219]

Constructivism can also help explain Sunni and Shia dynamics present in the Middle East. Mari Luomi explains that constructivism considers sectarian tensions in the Middle East to originate from the "bottom-up," meaning that "inter-state relations are contingent upon the way identity is constructed: supra-state and –national identities, such as the Shia identity, compete with state identity in the Middle East."[220] Conversely, neorealism contends that states use sectarian issues instrumentally to advance their own interests. Therefore, Luomi argues that neorealism provides the best understanding of the regional landscape, whereas constructivism most adequately explains sectarianism that exists inside states.[221] However, constructivism's emphasis on identity need not be confined to interpreting Sunni and Shia tensions within states – it could also help explain the sectarianism prevalent throughout the region.

Unlike constructivism, neorealism fails to account for a variety of factors that play a role in the Middle East. If neorealism was expanded, Sunni and Shia actors could be viewed as competing forces in the Middle East that seek to balance one another.

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218 Snyder.

219 Hinnebusch, 9.

220 Mari Luomi, *Sectarian Identities or Geopolitics? The Regional Shia-Sunni Divide in the Middle East* (Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2008), 15.

221 *Ibid.*, 16.

Certainly, not every conflict in the Middle East is caused by sectarian tensions, and there are variances in beliefs within the Sunni and Shia sects. Nonetheless, history demonstrates that balancing between Sunni and Shia actors has occurred in recent years. In 2006 and 2007, Nasr argued for the existence of a Shia rise or revival throughout the Middle East: "The Shia revival will further bolster the expansion of Iran's regional influence and its claim to 'great power' status."[222] However, subsequent events suggest that Sunni Islam has been a balancing force to Shiism. For instance, Sunni fighters in Syria are disrupting the government led by Bashar al-Assad, an Alawite supported by Iran. Moreover, the al Qaeda-affiliated Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), propelled by the belief that Shias should be killed merely because of religious affiliation, is violently targeting Shia civilians in Iraq.[223]

All this suggests that the balance of power in the Middle East transcends states – it involves sectarian dynamics and includes non-state groups. As a non-state group, the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood managed to, at least temporarily, wrest power from the entrenched Egyptian government during the Arab Spring. Hezbollah and Hamas are two other examples of non-state groups that succeeded in obtaining key positions of power in the region. Neorealism should, therefore, be modified to include non-state groups as aspects of the balance of power. As Douglas Lemke argues, "existing power politics theories are not logically restricted to analysis of only official states. Statements by Waltz and others that official states are the primary actors in world politics are not proof

222 Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 222.

223 Brett McGurk, "Al-Qaeda's Resurgence in Iraq: A Threat to U.S. Interests," Statement to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, February 5, 2014, http://www.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/221274.htm (accessed February 16, 2014).

that their theories do not apply to nonstate actors."[224] Scholars like Mearsheimer will likely argue such a revision would be impossible, as it would weaken realism and perhaps invalidate other portions of the theory. If the theory was modified to include non-state actors, it should only include groups that could practically engage in balancing behaviors. Non-state actors that possess significant caches of weapons, such as Hezbollah, could potentially engage in balancing. Smaller groups that lack such capabilities would probably be unable to impact the regional balance of power.

Alternately, another theory could be developed that better aligns with the current realities in the Middle East. One potential candidate is the modified liberal theory articulated by Andrew Moravcsik. The first assumption in his theory states: "The fundamental actors in international politics are individuals and private groups, who are on the average rational and risk-averse and who organize and exchange collective action to promote differentiated interests . . ."[225] While a complete analysis of Moravscik's theory would exceed the scope of this thesis, the theory's focus on individuals and groups should be considered when analyzing the Middle East.

Both neorealism and constructivism can help scholars and policymakers understand the Middle Eastern region. Neorealism highlights the importance of survival as a driver of state behavior and provide insight into the anarchic nature of the international system. However, it ignores questions of identity and assumes that state

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224 Douglas Lemke, "Power Politics and Wars without States," *American Journal of Political Science* (October 1, 2008), 774.

225 Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Previously Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (autumn 1997), https://www.princeton.edu/~amoravcs/library/preferences.pdf (accessed February 15, 2014), 516.

interests are static and unchanging. Constructivism emphasizes the role of identity, including supra-state identities, in the region. However, even though constructivism purportedly seeks to improve states' understanding of each other, it does not provide a mechanism for accomplishing this. Neorealism, in contrast, provides a framework that helps states interpret each other's intentions.[226] Thus, scholars and policymakers could benefit from understanding both theories. Moreover, regardless of which theory is used to interpret Middle Eastern dynamics, the Sunni-Shia split will continue to impact the region and influence Iran's foreign policy choices.

Iranian Shia Identity and Foreign Policymaking

Defining Pragmatism

The following sections consider how Iran's Shia identity influences the nation's foreign policy. As demonstrated below, Iran's foreign policy behavior tends to be primarily motivated by pragmatism, rather than ideology. In this context, the term pragmatism is used to refer to the concept known as *Realpolitik* or realistic policy, "a foreign policy that recognizes self-interest and power as the driving forces of international reality."[227] R. K Ramazani asserts that "the balance of ideology and pragmatism in the making of Iranian foreign policy decisions has been one of the most persistent, intricate, and difficult issues in all Iranian history, from the sixth century B.C.,

226 Dale C. Copeland, "The Constructivist Challenge to Structural Realism: A Review Essay," *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Autumn 2000): 201-202

227 "Realism, Political" in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* ed. William A. Darity, Jr., 96-97 (Detroit: Macmillian Reference USA, 2008), 96.

when the Iranian state was born, to the present time."[228] He argues that Iranian policymakers have historically attempted to combine pragmatism with spirituality, and cites Cyrus (558-530 B.C.) and Shah Abbas I (1587-1629) as examples of Iranian leaders who employed pragmatic statesmanship. In addition, he explains that since the Iranian revolution, the blend of pragmatism and spirituality "has often been expressed in terms of the Quranic-based norm of *hikmah* (wisdom) and *hekmat* in Persian. *Hekmat* has two dimensions, pragmatic . . . as well as spiritual."[229] Thus, it seems warranted to consider Iran's behavior through this lens.

Geopolitical Concerns: Regional Hegemony

Iran's aspiration toward regional dominance has historically been part of Iran's foreign policy orientation. This drive has been influenced by Iranian geography, history, and status as a long-standing civilization.[230] A multitude of scholars concur that Iran is currently aspiring toward regional hegemony. For example, Ze'ev Maghen claims that Iran has sought to lead the Muslim world since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iran's desire for regional hegemony is one of its fundamental goals, the other goal being self-preservation.[231] According to Shahram Chubin, Iran sees itself as resisting the United

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228 R. K. Ramazani, "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Journal* 58, no. 4 (Autumn 2004): 549.

229 R. K. Ramazani, *Independence Without Freedom: Iran's Foreign Policy* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2013), e-book.

230 Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "The Foreign Policy of Iran," in *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*, ed. Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 286.

231 Ze'ev Maghen, "Unity or Hegemony? Iranian Attitudes to the Sunni-Shi'i Divide," in *The Sunna and Shi'a in History: Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Ofra Bengio and Meir Litvak (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2011), 183.

States, a country seeking supremacy in the Middle East.[232] As Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stated, Iran resists U.S. hegemony by "presenting a blueprint for an Islamic republic . . . and defending the deprived masses in the world of Islam and the wronged people who have been trampled upon by tyranny."[233] Thus, Chubin explains that Iran "is a revisionist state in terms of status, not territory."[234]

A report by several RAND analysts provides a similar, but more nuanced view regarding Iran's regional ambitions, arguing that "many within [Iran's] current regime appear to view Iran as indispensable regional power, but not necessarily a revolutionary hegemon."[235] Iranian perception towards regional hegemony is reflected in an article in Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC) weekly magazine, which states, "The U.S. considers Iran as a challenge to its hegemony in the region. At the same time, the U.S. has realized that its victory in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine is dependent on its relations with Iran."[236] With the fall of Afghanistan and Iraq's Sunni regimes, Iran's ability to further enhance its regional standing increased. Because the hostile Taliban and Ba'athist regimes no longer surround Iran, the country can pursue greater regional

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232 Shahram Chubin, "Iran's Power in Context," *Survival* 51, no. 1 (February-March 2009), http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/shahram_survival20090201.pdf (accessed July 31, 2012), 166.

233 Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, broadcast on Iran TV News Channel, June 3, 2008, in Shahram Chubin, "Iran's Power in Context," *Survival* 51, no. 1 (February-March 2009), http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/shahram_survival20090201.pdf (accessed July 31, 2012), 166.

234 Chubin, "Iran's Power in Context," 166.

235 Wehrey et al., xv.

236 Farsan Shahidi, "Unsuccessful U.S. Policies in the Middle East," *Sobhe Sadegh* (weekly magazine of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps), in Persian, n.d., in Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 3.

dominance.[237]

Iran's Shia identity plays a role in its goals of regional supremacy. As the largest Shia nation, Iran has been closely linked to Persian Gulf Shia communities and to countries where Shias are influential, including Lebanon and Iraq.[238] Iran's leaders have a history of using Shia identity to further their internal and external goals. According to some analysts, Shia ideology was used to enhance Iran's regional standing even prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, when the Shah was in power in Iran.[239] Shia identity has also been used to garner internal support for the regime. For instance, Ayatollah Khomeini used the message of Shia messianism to further his leadership of the revolution.[240]

Vali Nasr sees the rise of leaders like former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as indication that Sunni opposition and Shia resurgence will become increasingly important in Iran's regional and political goals.[241] This claim seems likely considering the background of Ahmadinejad, who comes from a particularly anti-Sunni and anti-Wahhabi element of the Islamic Revolution that strongly adhered to core Shia values. After Ahmadinejad came to power in 2005, Iranian propaganda against resident Sunnis

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237 Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 222.

238 *Ibid.*, 212.

239 Kayhan Barzegar, "Regionalism in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly* 9, nos. 3-4 (fall 2010-winter 2011), http://en.merc.ir/default.aspx?tabid=98&ArticleId=303 (accessed July 28, 2012).

240 Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 130.

241 *Ibid.*, 225.

became increasingly harsh.[242]

Nonetheless, Iran's Shia identity poses a challenge to the nation's regional desires. Although the majority of Iran's population is Shia,[243] most Muslims worldwide are Sunni.[244] Iran's rise to power can be interpreted by Sunni nations as a Shia rise, and as such, Sunni countries may feel threatened by Iran's advancement toward regional hegemony. Jordan's King Abdullah II voiced concerns of a "Shiite crescent" of political influence stretching from the Persian Gulf to Lebanon and Syria, a crescent Abdullah saw as originating from Iran and Iraq.[245] Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt spokesman Essam el-Erian echoed these fears, stating, "If Iran developed a nuclear power, then it is a big disaster because it already supports Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, Syria and Iraq, then what is left? . . . We would have the Shiite crescent that the Jordanian king warned against."[246]

Sheik Adel al-Mawada, deputy speaker in Bahrain's parliament and member of the Sunni fundamentalist Salafi bloc, stated similar concerns: "If Iran acted like an Islamic power, just Islam without Shiism, then Arabs would accept it as a regional Islamic power. . . . But if it came to us with the Shia agenda as a Shiite power, then it will

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242 *Ibid.*, 225.

243 *Ibid.*, 212.

244 Maghen, 183.

245 Lee Smith, "Bush, the Great Shiite Liberator," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/01/weekinreview/01smith.html (accessed August 5, 2012).

246 Michael Slackman, Mona el-Naggar, and Abeer Allam, "Iran the Great Unifier? The Arab World Is Wary," *The New York Times*, February 5, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/05/weekinreview/05slackman.html?pagewanted=all (accessed August 5, 2012).

not succeed and it will be powerful, but despised and hated."[247] Although Arab concerns over Iran could stem from resistance to a changing power dynamic in the Middle East, Mawada's quote suggests that at least some Arab politicians foster suspicion toward Iran's rise simply because of its Shia identity. Moreover, Iran's Persian identity could also cause Arab nations to view the country as an outsider.

As Mawada suggested, Iran's regional interests are likely furthered when the nation embraces its Islamic identity and downplays its Shia roots to Sunni nations. Iran appears to be trying to mitigate international Sunni concerns by influencing Arab public opinion in its favor. Through the *ensejam-e-Eslami* or "Islamic harmony" campaign, Iran has attempted to spread the message that Sunni Islam and Shiism are essentially the same, with differences between the two being small and inconsequential. This message was spread through the press, music, billboards, websites, international conferences, advertisements, prayer services, speaking tours, articles in a variety of languages, and religious scholars' books.[248] Iran has used both local and transnational media to disseminate messages that it supports the Palestinians and Hezbollah and challenges the status quo.[249]

Iran's anti-Israel and anti-Western rhetoric may have been employed strategically in order to distract from Sunni-Shia sectarian concerns and further Iran's regional goals. Arab publics supported former president Ahmadinejad's hostility toward Israel, as well as

247 Slackman, el-Naggar, and Allam, 3.

248 Maghen, 184.

249 Wehrey et. al, xix.

his resistance to U.S. demands regarding Iran's nuclear program.[250] Perhaps as an attempt to increase its regional popularity, Iran blamed the Jews and Western powers for creating sectarian strife between the Shia and Sunni communities.[251] Ahmadinejad stated that "the main goal of the leaders of the U.S. in Bahrain and Libya is saving the Zionist regime, even if thousands of people are killed . . . They are trying to incite Iran-Arab conflict and Shia-Sunni war in the region only to save the Zionist regime."[252] Similarly, Supreme Leader Khamenei said, "In the modern era, colonialism made the maximum use of the (Muslims') ignorance, prejudices, and unsound understanding to create division, and after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, this process was intensified . . ."[253] Ahmadinejad's foreign policy toward Israel was a shift from prior Iranian leaders who supported the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. Ahmadinejad advocated for Israel's removal from the map and challenged the validity of the Holocaust. According to Said Amir Arjomand, "The hardening of Iran's opposition to Israel was fully in line with the Leader's continued championship of the Palestinians to bolster his own bid to be the Leader of the world's Muslims."[254]

This tenor, however, seems to have changed at least somewhat with the election of Iran's new president, Rouhani. Rouhani, for instance, dodged a question from a reporter regarding whether the Holocaust was "a myth." Rouhani did describe Israel's

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250 *Ibid*.

251 Maghen, 184-185.

252 "Hegemons want Shia-Sunni war: Ahmadinejad," *Tehran Times*, April 9, 2011.

253 "Promoters of discord are neither Shia nor Sunni: Leader," *Tehran Times*, January 16, 2007.

254 Arjomand, 197.

government as "an occupier and usurper" that "does injustice to the people of the region, and has brought instability to the region, with its warmongering politics." Nonetheless, Rouhani's rhetoric still seems to lack the vitriol of Ahmadinejad's – he clarified that Iran was "seeking peace and stability among all nations in the region . . ."[255] By softening its rhetoric on Israel, Iran could be attempting to change its reputation as a "rogue nation" and reintegrate itself into the international system. However, by remaining opposed to Israel, Iran could be indicating a desire to unite with Arab nations around a common cause.

In summary, while Iran's Shia identity is important, Iran appears to be minimizing this characteristic when dealing with Sunni nations. By emphasizing commonalities Iran shares with Sunni Muslims, Iran is likely trying to lessen concerns of Shia dominance or a Shia crescent. Former president Ahmadinejad's hostile language toward the West and Israel could be interpreted an attempt to gain stature in the Muslim world and distract from sectarian divides. These actions could be seen as motivated by practical, rather than ideological or religious, concerns.

Geopolitical Concerns: Iran's Relationship with Iraq

Another major element of Iran's current regional policy orientation is its relationship with post-war Iraq.[256] A statement from Ayatollah Khamenei illustrates the importance of Iraq to Iran: "Although certain people are worried about the expansion of

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255 Tracy Connor and Henry Austin, "EXCLUSIVE: Iran president blames Israel for 'instability,' calls for peace," September 19, 2013, http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/exclusive-iran-president-blames-israel-instability-calls-peace-v20573897 (accessed February 17, 2014).

256 Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 242.

ties between Tehran and Baghdad, we think that strengthening of ties is in favor of us and the region."[257] Iran is interested in a Shia-led Iraqi government, as this would enhance Iran's ability to establish religious-based ties with Iraq.[258] Iran does not think Iraqi Shias will support Iranian goals over their own interests, although it does hope a Shia-led Iraq will be a friendly neighbor. Furthermore, Iran is interested in preventing Iraq from being led by Sunnis, who have previously engaged in war with Iran.[259] Iran's current policy is significantly affected by memories of the Iran-Iraq war. According to majority opinion in Iran, Sunni dominance in Iraq was the source of Iraqi hostility.[260] Thus, Iran's desire to strengthen relationships with Iraqi Shias may stem from practical, as opposed to religious, considerations. It seems logical for Iran to use its religious commonality as a way to exert soft power in Iraq.[261]

Iran's foreign policy in Iraq reflects several key interests. First, Iran realized its goals in Iraq would be best furthered through democracy, which would inevitably strengthen Iraq's Shias.[262] Thus, Iran has supported elections in Iraq. Iran also wants to maintain a unified Iraq, as an Iraq divided into multiple nations would lead to instability.[263] A fractured Iraq would lead to refugee challenges and possibly encourage

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257 "LEADER: Occupiers Planning to Remain in Iraq Long," *Iran News*, March 1, 2009.

258 Haynes, 159.

259 Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 237-238.

260 *Ibid.*, 253.

261 Haynes, 160.

262 Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 250.

263 *Ibid.*, 252.

secession amongst Iran's minorities, including the Kurds.[264] The concern of a divided Iraq was voiced in February 1980 by Saddam Hussein,[265] who stated, "[U]nless the inhabitants of Iraq demonstrated their loyalty to a specifically Iraqi state, the country would be divided into three 'mini-states': one Arab Sunni, one Arab Shi'i and one Kurdish."[266] Furthermore, because Iran's regional goals were threatened by the presence of U.S. forces in the area,[267] Iran advocated for the removal of these forces. Ayatollah Khamenei stated, "The presence of American and British military men and their experts and security forces in Iraq is harmful to that country and the occupying armies should go out of Iraq as soon as possible, since any delay in this matter, even for one day, would do more harm to the Iraqi nation."[268] In light of these varied goals, Iran has pursued several seemingly conflicting policies: it has supported elections, tolerated certain Sunni elements, and funded Shia militias.[269]

Iran also pursues its objectives in the region by funding Shia political parties, including the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and Dawa.[270] Although these

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264 Wehrey et al., 104.

265 Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shiite Movement in Iraq* (London: Saqi, 2003), 225.

266 Tripp, op. Cit., p 99 in Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* (London: Saqi, 2003), 226.

267 Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 252.

268 "LEADER: Occupiers Planning to Remain in Iraq Long," *Iran News*, 1 March 2009.

269 Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 252.

270 Geoffrey Kemp, "Iran and Iraq: The Shia Connection, Soft Power, and the Nuclear Factor," United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 156, November 2005, http://www.usip.org/files/resources/sr156.pdf (accessed August 5, 2012), 5. ISCI was formerly known as SCIRI, so many authors refer to the party by that term. For information on SCIRI's name change, see Soren Schmidt, *Shia-Islamist Political Actors in Iraq: Who are they and what do they want?* (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2008), http://www.diis.dk/graphics/Publications/Reports%202008/DIIS-RP_2008-3_web.pdf (accessed August 5, 2012), 24.

parties state they operate independently from Tehran, Iran can substantially influence Iraqi politics through their infrastructure.[271] Iran's longstanding relationship with ISCI demonstrates Iran's commitment to exerting influence in Iraq through the party. ISCI was established on November 17, 1982 by Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim.[272] Al-Hakim enjoyed the support of Khamenei, who was not yet Iran's ayatollah, but served as leader of Friday prayers in Tehran and as Khomeini's Higher Defense Council representative.[273] ISCI was formed in and funded by Iran. The Badr Brigade, ISCI's armed force, received the assistance of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.[274] Iran has also been tied to ISCI's intelligence unit, which has been managed by Iran.[275] Dai Yamao explains that "under the auspices of the SCIRI's [ISCI's] umbrella, the Iranian regime's impact on the Iraqi Islamists increased in terms of both direct control and ideological influence."[276] Thus, Iranian support of Iraqi Shia political parties can be seen as a consistent element of Iran's foreign policy and a way to exert influence over its neighbor.

Iran's goals in Iraq are also impacted by religious considerations regarding Shia influence. The Iraqi city of Najaf and the Iranian city of Qom have both been locations of Shia scholarship. However, Najaf held greater importance than Qom before being

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271 Kemp, 9.

272 Jabar, 235.

273 *Ibid.*, 237.

274 Schmidt, 12.

275 Jabar, 241.

276 Dai Yamao, "Iraqi Islamist parties in international politics: The impact of historical and international politics on political conflict in post-war Iraq," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 6, no. 1 (2012): 33.

suppressed by Iraq's Ba'athist governments. Consequently, Iran is concerned about Najaf increasing in stature. It is also apprehensive about Grand Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani, a Shia leader who enjoys a large following in Najaf schools.[277] According to RAND analysts, al-Sistani "has long been seen as the most serious challenger to the Supreme Leader's claim of more leadership in the Shi'ite world. It was only the stifling restrictions placed on Najaf by Saddam Hussein that prevented al-Sistani from exercising the spiritual, and possibly political, influence commensurate with his stature."[278] Al-Sistani also functions as a "source of emulation" or *marja' al-taqlid* – a guide for Shias. Shias who adhere to his guidance include Iranians who are unhappy with Iran's political situation.[279] Furthermore, Ayatollah Khomeini's idea of *velayat-e faqih*, or "mandate of the jurist to rule,"[280] is not championed by al-Sistani.[281] As mentioned earlier, Khomeini's political philosophy subverts the traditional independence of Shia jurists, given that it requires jurists to follow another jurist who forms a government. This position especially contradicts the independence of the *marja' al-taqlid.*[282] Although al-Sistani has not written about *velayat-e faqih*, he essentially holds the viewpoint that the concept has a

277 Wehrey et al., 19.

278 *Ibid.*, 19-20.

279 *Ibid.*, 20.

280 Arjomand, 21.

281 Mehdi Khalaji, "The Last Marja: Sistani and the End of Traditional Religious Authority in Shiism," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus #59, September 2006, 14-15. http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus59final.pdf (accessed August 4, 2012).

282 Arjomand, 22.

limited scope.[283]

Najaf and al-Sistani thus pose a potential challenge to Iran's theory of government and location as an important Shia center of learning. Iran seems be addressing these concerns through the use of economic soft power. In hopes of improving its Islamic reputation, Iran has given cash to Shia school instructors and students. It has also dispatched over 2,000 scholars and students to Karbala and Najaf, Shia cities of importance.[284] In particular, 'Ali la-Tashkiri, Khamenei's representative, has made trips to Iraq to distribute gifts to institutions in the Najaf Learning Center, "thus bringing them under Ayatollah Khamenei's influence, making credible his claim to be the spiritual leader of all the Muslims of the world."[285] These examples demonstrate Iran's use of soft power to improve its standing in the Iraqi Shia religious community.

Iran's strategy toward Iraq appears to be primarily driven by pragmatic concerns of security and influence. Iran supports a Shia-dominated Iraq because it furthers Iran's security in the region and makes relationships with its neighbor easier to maintain. Iran has also historically sought to influence Iraqi politics, specifically focusing on Shia factions in the country. However, the possible rise of Najaf threatens Iran's standing as a center for Shia scholarship. As such, Iran has attempted to mitigate Iraq's Shia influence through the use of economic soft power.

Security Concerns: Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

Iran's nuclear program has historically been a source of contention between the

283 Khalaji, "The Last Marja: Sistani and the End of Traditional Religious Authority in Shiism," 14-15.

284 Wehrey et al., 109.

285 Arjomand, 176-177.

nation and Western powers, including the United States. While Iran is currently participating in talks regarding its nuclear program, the outcome of such talks is yet to be seen. Analysts disagree on the motives of Iran's nuclear program, some asserting it is based on ideological considerations, and others arguing it is pragmatically driven.[286] The role of Shiism in Iran's nuclear goals also varies. Some scholars do not discuss Iran's Shia identity in relation to its nuclear program, instead focusing on issues such as deterrence, regional ambitions, and internal support for the regime. Others emphasize the role of Shia messianism in shaping Iran's nuclear quest. A third viewpoint focuses on how Iran's nuclear goals are interpreted by other countries in the context of the Sunni-Shia balance of power. It appears that Iran's nuclear program has been primarily driven by pragmatic considerations, and as such remains consistent with other aspects of Iranian foreign policy. Religious considerations may also play a role, albeit a lesser one. Finally, Iran's Shia identity seems to influence the way Sunni nations perceive its nuclear program.

Some scholars identify deterrence, regional ambitions, and increased internal patriotism as drivers behind Iran's nuclear policy. Shahram Chubin asserts that Iran's nuclear program was originally motivated by security concerns, but was subsequently furthered by a desire for respect and an increased international role.[287] Gawdat Bahgat highlights Iran's regional ambitions as motivators for its nuclear program, stating that "an Iran with nuclear weapons would have increased leverage to influence regional policy, a greater ability to intimidate its neighbors, and an enhanced position from which to

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286 Wehrey et al., 8.

287 Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*, 8, 16.

challenge US involvement in the region."[288] RAND analysts identify deterrence as a key driver of Iran's military and political designs, including its ambition for enrichment and a possible nuclear weapon.[289] Ray Takeyh explains that the nuclear program inspires patriotism and increases internal support of the Iranian regime.[290] Similarly, Said Amir Arjomand says, ". . . Ahmadinejad's insistence on Iran's nuclear 'rights' is popular with the Iranian masses and the middle class alike."[291] Explanations of deterrence, regional ambitions, and legitimacy as motivators for Iran's nuclear ambitions are consistent with a pragmatic view of Iranian foreign policy.

In contrast, other scholars highlight religion as a driver behind Iran's nuclear program. Analysts emphasizing the role of Shiism in Iran's nuclear program point to the role of the Hidden Imam or Mahdi.[292] Considered a messiah-type figure, the occulted Mahdi will return prior to the world's end and form a new international government.[293] A small segment of people take a "violent apocalyptic approach" to the Mahdi, using violence as a way to speed his return.[294] According to Mehdi Khalaji, former president

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288 Bahgat, 5-18.

289 Wehrey et al., 32.

290 Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 249-250.

291 Arjomand, 200.

292 Mehdi Khalaji, *Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Policy*, vii.

293 *Ibid.*, 3.

294 Michael Eisenstadt, "Religious Ideologies, Political Doctrines, and Iran's Nuclear Decisionmaking," in *Nuclear Fatwa: Religion and Politics in Iran's Proliferation Strategy,* Michael Eisenstadt and Mehdi Khalaji (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2011), http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus115.pdf (accessed August 18, 2012), 6.

Ahmadinejad is a part of a secret society that thinks the Mahdi's return is impending. This society's beliefs are difficult to discern. However, Khalaji explains the group believes it is possible to speed the Mahdi's return through advanced technology. In addition, some rumors indicate the society would like control over the Iranian nuclear program.[295] Similarly, Jeffrey Haynes explains, "Many argue that a religious component underpins Iran's nuclear programme *[sic]*, which allegedly grows out of an apocalyptic vision envisaging widespread devastation or ultimate doom."[296]

Michael Eisenstadt offers a nuanced interpretation of Iranian policy, arguing that tension exists between the practical needs of government and religious commands. He asserts that Iran has been inclined towards pragmatism since the late 1980s. However, he argues that ". . . the operational imperatives that flow from the doctrine of resistance . . . and the ideology of political Mahdism (to stand fast and fight the enemies of the Islamic Republic in anticipation of the messianic era) coexist uneasily with the pragmatism and flexibility in the regime's doctrine of expediency."[297] These types of tensions could be partially caused by the divergent views of Ahmadinejad and Khamenei. Ahmadinejad, whose views were apocalyptic, emphasized the Mahdi in his speeches.[298] In contrast, Khamenei's speeches are not dominated by the Mahdi, and he does not think the Mahdi has an impact on a believer's daily life. Khalaji explains that ". . . Khamenei does not hold a political messianic set of ideas, but his religious mentality, mixed with his five

295 Mehdi Khalaji, *Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Policy*, vii.

296 Haynes, 160.

297 Eisenstadt, 7.

298 Mehdi Khalaji, *Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Policy*, 21.

decades of political experience, makes him an ambiguous and ambivalent character whose ideas can stem from political calculations as well as esoteric consultations."[299]

Eisenstadt interprets Ahmadinejad's politicization of the Mahdi as a strategic way that the former Iranian president furthered his objectives.[300] This viewpoint is echoed by Iranian clerics. Mohsen Kadivar, a Tehran-located philosophy professor and reformist cleric, was quoted as saying: ". . . The legitimacy of Ahmadinejad comes from traditional religious thought [over half a century ago] . . . Ahmadinejad and his men believe it is popular, [but] it's a very simple interpretation. We don't believe in it; the majority of academics don't believe in it."[301] According to Qom seminary professor Mohammad Ali Ayazi, Ahmadinejad did not possess legitimacy, so he resorted to influencing Iranians through religion. Ayazi was quoted as saying, "It's very dangerous, a person exploiting religion for political achievement, because everyone has their own relationship with God."[302]

Thus, Ahmadinejad's use of the Mahdi to possibly legitimize Iran's nuclear program may have been a method of increasing his popularity and furthering his objectives amongst a certain segment of Iranian society. However, even if Ahmadinejad used the Mahdi as a political motivator, his belief in the Mahdi and in nuclear progress for the Mahdi's sake may still be sincere. Ahmadinejad's political messianism indicates

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299 *Ibid.*, 20.

300 Eisenstadt, 6.

301 Scott Peterson, "Waiting for the rapture in Iran," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 21, 2005, http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1221/p01s04-wome.html (accessed August 12, 2012).

302 Peterson.

that Shiism has played a role in Iranian policy, or at least in policy relating to nuclear weapons. However, Ahmadinejad has since been replaced by Rouhani, who seems to be more pragmatic and less extreme. In addition, Khamenei does not appear to be motivated by the Mahdi as Ahmadinejad.[303] Furthermore, even if religion has influenced Iran's nuclear policies, the nation can still possess an overall foreign policy bent toward pragmatism.

Iran's Shia identity seems to impact how other countries in the region view Iran's nuclear goals.[304] Vali Nasr explains that Pakistan's nuclear abilities can be seen as a "Sunni Bomb," and noted that Saudi Arabia funded Pakistan's nuclear program in pursuit of its own regional objectives.[305] Iran's initial interest in acquiring nuclear weapons stemmed from concerns about the Pakistan-Saudi relationship and Iraq. Nasr explains, "An Iranian nuclear capacity would have helped Iran to contain the Sunni pressure and even reverse the balance of power to its own advantage. . . . An Iranian bomb would also be a Shia bomb, confirming Shia power in the region and protecting Iran's larger footprint."[306] RAND analysts explain that Arab leadership must balance concern towards Iran's nuclear program with the understanding that their people are mostly supportive of Iran's nuclear goals. The RAND report states, ". . . some Arab officials are exploiting Sunni Arab fears of a Shi'ite ascendancy and sectarian strife in their media outlets to

303 Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 241.

304 Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 222-223.

305 *Ibid.*, 222.

306 *Ibid.*, 222-223.

curry favor for what is essentially a classic balance-of-power strategy against Iran."[307]

However, a Pew Research study demonstrates that Arab publics may not favor Iran's nuclear program to the extent that RAND analysts claim. According to this study, 76 percent of Jordanians, 66 percent of Egyptians, 54 percent of Turks, and 62 percent of Lebanese are actually opposed to Iran obtaining nuclear weapons. Opposition has grown in Jordan and Egypt since 2006. The results from Tunisians are mixed – 43 percent are against it, but 42 percent support it. These study results suggest that Arab support for Iranian nuclear weapons may be largely determined by religious affiliation. In Lebanon, 73 percent of Shias are supportive, whereas 94 percent of Sunnis are opposed.[308] Further research is needed to determine if Arab publics' support of Iranian nuclear weapons is based on religious identity. However, the limited data from the Pew Research Center suggests that the Sunni-Shia split plays a role in Arabs' perception of Iranian nuclear ambitions.

Iran's nuclear program appears to be primarily motivated by pragmatic concerns, such as deterrence, regional goals, and bolstering popular support for the regime. Shia apocalyptic beliefs may have played a lesser role in Iranian nuclear objectives, but these factors have likely diminished or disappeared altogether under Rouhani's new presidential leadership. Finally, Iran's Shia identity appears to impact the way Arab nations and their populaces perceive Iran's nuclear program, especially regarding whether they view an Iranian bomb as a threat.

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307 Wehrey et al., xx.

308 "Divisions on Sanction and Use of Force: A Global 'No' To a Nuclear-Armed Iran," PewResearchCenter, May 18, 2012, http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/05/18/a-global-no-to-a-nuclear-armed-iran/ (accessed August 11, 2012).

Iran's Support of Non-State Actors

Iran's support of militant, non-state actors is one of its main regional foreign policy elements.[309] This section will explore Iran's support of non-state actors by comparing its support of Hamas, a Sunni Palestinian organization, with Hezbollah, a Shia Lebanese group.[310] Iran's Shia identity seems to affect Iran's policy of supporting organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas. As seen in other aspects of its foreign policy, Iran appears mindful of Sunni-Shia tensions present in the Middle East. It uses support of non-state actors as a way to eclipse sectarian concerns and increase its regional standing amongst Arabs. However, these objectives may be harmed by the recent Syrian conflict and Iran's decision to support an unpopular dictator. Iran also supports non-state actors for other reasons, such as deterrence.

Hamas, which was formed in the late 1960s, is a Palestinian militant organization that aims to destroy Israel and form a West Bank and Gaza Islamist state.[311] The group is a militant offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization conceived in Egypt that is both Sunni and Islamist. To further its political objectives, Hamas targets Israel through attacks such as suicide bombings and rocket launches.[312] The organization also spends a large amount of money in support of social services, including orphanages, health clinics,

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309 Wehrey et al., xvi.

310 Graham E. Fuller, "The Hizballah-Iran Connection: Model for Sunni Resistance," *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (winter 2006-2007): 147.

311 Council on Foreign Relations, "Hamas," updated October 20, 2011, http://www.cfr.org/israel/hamas/p8968#p5 (accessed August 18, 2012).

312 START, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, "Terrorist Profile: Hamas," http://www.start.umd.edu/start/data_collections/tops/terrorist_organization_profile.asp?id=49 (accessed August 18, 2012).

schools, soup kitchens, sports leagues, and mosques. Its social service efforts contribute to its popularity amongst Palestinians. Hamas' popularity was seen in the 2006 Palestinian Authority legislative elections,[313] when it won 76 out of 132 seats in the Palestinian parliament.[314]

According to the State Department, Iran has provided support to Hamas in the form of funds, training, and weapons.[315] Some diplomats assert that Iran may provide $20 to $30 million in funding to Hamas per annum.[316] However, the Syrian conflict impacted the relationship between Hamas and Iran. Hamas' leadership backs the Syrian rebels and has departed from Damascus, actions that indicate a possible rupture in the Hamas-Iran relationship.[317] The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported that Iranian funds to Hamas have been lessened or eliminated after Hamas did not publicly affirm Syrian President Bashar Assad.[318] Moussa Abu Marzouk, Hamas's deputy political leader, was quoted as saying, "Our position on Syria is that we are not with the regime in its security solution, and we respect the will of the people . . . The Iranians are not happy with our

313 Council on Foreign Relations, "Hamas."

314 START, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism.

315 U.S. Department of State, "Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism," Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, July 31, 2012, http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195547.htm (accessed August 18, 2012).

316 Council on Foreign Relations, "Hamas."

317 Tony Karon, "Hamas Signals Break with Iran, But Is That Good for Israel?" *TIME*, February 29, 2012, http://world.time.com/2012/02/29/hamas-signals-a-break-with-iran-but-is-that-good-for-israel/ (accessed August 18, 2012).

318 "Iran cuts Hamas funding for failing to show support for Assad," *Haaretz*, August 21, 2011, http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/iran-cuts-hamas-funding-for-failing-to-show-support-for-assad-1.379845 (accessed August 18, 2012).

position on Syria, and when they are not happy, they don't deal with you in the same old way."[319]

Hezbollah is a Lebanese Shia organization that functions as a political party and a Shia militia. The group is designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department[320] and has targeted Israel and U.S. interests. Hezbollah is estimated to have anti-aircraft, anti-tank, and anti-ship weapons, in addition to 40,000 to 80,000 long and short-range rockets. Like Hamas, the organization provides social welfare services such as schools and hospitals.[321] Iran is closely tied to Hezbollah in a relationship the Congressional Research Services describes "as patron-client, or mentor and protege."[322] Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader, subscribes to Ayatollah Khamenei's theological direction. In addition, Hezbollah has received training from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which has given Hezbollah much of the group's weapons. The U.S. government estimates that Iran provides tens of millions of dollars in funds to Hezbollah per year.[323] However, Iran's support of Hezbollah does not translate

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319 "Hamas political leaders leave Syria for Egypt and Qatar," *BBC News Middle East*, February 28, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17192278 (accessed August 18, 2012).

320 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Hezbollah: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Casey L. Addis and Christopher M. Blanchard, CRS Report R41446 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, January 3, 2011), 1.

321 Council on Foreign Relations, "Hezbollah (a.k.a. Hizbollah, Hizbu'llah)," July 15, 2010, http://www.cfr.org/lebanon/hezbollah-k-hizbollah-hizbullah/p9155 (accessed August 19, 2012).

322 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict*, by Jeremy M. Sharp et al., CRS Report RL33566 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, August 14, 2006), 19.

323 Fuller, 142-143.

into complete control over the group.[324] RAND analysts explain, "Just because the ongoing relationship furthers Iran's interests, however, does not necessarily mean that Hezbollah will always act in Iran's strategic interests."[325]

Some scholars argue that Iran supports non-state actors with the goal of increased deterrence. RAND analysts explain that Iranian support of Islamists strengthens Iran's deterrent and retaliatory capabilities.[326] According to some U.S. government officials, Iran may want to use Hezbollah to carry out attacks, thus enabling Iran to increase its military power while maintaining "a certain degree of plausible deniability."[327] In addition, by supporting Hamas and Hezbollah, Iran aids groups linked to Israel and Palestine. Iran's support of these popular issues could be seen as a way to increase regime legitimacy amongst Arabs and bolster Iranian regional goals. Ray Takeyh asserts, ". . . Iran's inflammatory denunciations (even of Israel) can be partly attributed to its attempt to mobilize the region behind its leadership. A defiant Iran flanked by Hezbollah and Hamas is standing firm against the Zionist encroachment and has captured the imagination of the Arab masses."[328] RAND analysts identify Iran's support of Hezbollah and Palestinian groups as buying "Iran enormous symbolic currency among Arab publics who are frustrated with the seemingly status quo approach of their authoritarian

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324 Wehrey et al., 83.

325 *Ibid.*, 98.

326 *Ibid.*, 34.

327 *Ibid.*, 97.

328 Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 260.

regimes."[329]

Similarly, Karim Sadjadpour explains that Iran's support of Hamas has been influenced by its regional ambitions and desire to overcome sectarian divisions. He asserts, "Iran's goal is to be the vanguard of the Islamic world and to be the regional power. The last thing they want to do is project Shiite power. They want to be a pan-Islamic power, so supporting groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad and supporting the Palestinian cause in general is Iran's best way to transcend this Sunni-Shiite divide."[330] Iran's desire to minimize Sunni-Shia sectarian concerns is also illustrated by Majlis speaker Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, who states, "Iran supports the . . . resistance movements Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. Islam is important to us. We will not let enemies cause divisions among us in the name of Shias and Sunni."[331] Graham Fuller also explains that Iran usually chooses not to highlight its Shia identity, but instead focuses on pan-Muslim, popular issues. Even though Iran supports revolutionary issues, Fuller argues that it pursues a pragmatically driven foreign policy.[332]

Like other scholars and analysts, RAND analysts downplay the role of religion and highlight Iran's realist objectives in supporting non-state actors. They argue that

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329 Wehrey et al., 81.

330 Karim Sadjadpour, Interview, "Iran Supports Hamas, but Hamas Is No Iranian 'Puppet,'" Council on Foreign Relations, January 8, 2009, http://www.cfr.org/israel/iran-supports-hamas-but-hamas-no-iranian-puppet/p18159 (accessed August 18, 2012).

331 "U.S. and Israel in conspiracy to create discord among Shias, Sunnis: Majlis speaker," *Tehran Times*, November 28, 2006, *Politics* section.

332 Fuller, 147.

while religion may play a role, it is secondary to pragmatic considerations.[333] Despite having interpreted Iran's support of Hamas through the lens of Iran's regional ambitions, Sadjadpour argues that Iran's anti-Israel stance is ideologically motivated.[334] Iran's support of non-state actors could also be driven by ideological concerns. Although Iran's motivations may never be fully known, it appears that Iran's support of non-state actors is primarily influenced by deterrence, as well as by a pragmatic desire for increased popularity with Arabs in the region.

Iran's goals of overcoming the Sunni-Shia divide by funding Hamas may be thwarted by the current Syria conflict. An *Associated Press* article notes that both Hezbollah and Iran have lost popularity due to supporting Syria's President Bashar Assad. The article interprets recent events as shifting the regional balance of power from Shias to Sunnis.[335] Iran's choice to support an unpopular Arab dictator, combined with a possible cessation of funds to Hamas, may damage its previous efforts to bolster its popularity amongst Sunni Arabs and increase its regional hegemony. It may also reverse some political capital that Iran gained from supporting non-state actors.

Conclusion

Unlike most countries in the Middle East, Iran is nation with a majority Shia Muslim population. This identity plays a role in the country's regional foreign policies, especially affecting how Iran navigates its relationships with Sunni Muslim nations in the

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333 Wehrey et al., 34.

334 Sadjadpour.

335 Hamza Hendawi, "Syria War Tipping Mideast Balance Toward Sunnis," *Associated Press*, *ABC News*, August 18, 2012, http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/syria-war-tipping-mideast-balance-sunnis-17034424#.UDFIgzGe4fw (accessed August 19, 2012).

Middle East. Iranian policy appears to be driven by pragmatism, but occasionally shows signs of religious influence. First, Iran's ambitions to become a regional hegemon are impacted by its Shia identity. Whether based off actual fears of Shia dominance or simply concerns of change to the status quo, Arab nations have expressed fears of a rising Iran. In hopes of quelling these fears and furthering its regional objectives, Iran appears to pursue policies emphasizing similarities with Sunni Muslims.

Second, Iran's goals in Iraq are influenced by Iran's Shia identity, as well as practical considerations of influence and security. Iran attempts to influence Iraqi politics because it aims to promote a friendly, Shia-dominated government in Iraq. In addition, Iran wants to retain regional supremacy and contain Iraq's influence. For instance, Iran wants its city, Qom, to maintain its stature as a foremost city of Shia scholarship, instead of being eclipsed by the Iraqi city of Najaf. Iran leverages economic soft power to mitigate this concern.

Third, Iran's nuclear ambitions are driven by considerations such as deterrence, regional ambitions, and regime legitimacy. Although Shia apocalyptic concepts may have influenced Ahmadinejad, Rouhani is now president, and Khamenei does not appear to emphasize these beliefs. Finally, Iran supports non-state actors like Hezbollah and Hamas primarily to enhance its standing in the Arab world and overcome Sunni and Shia sectarian concerns. However, Iran's support of the Syrian regime and its possible cessation of funds to Hamas may harm the Persian nation’s popularity amongst Arabs.

Moreover, as the Arab Spring changes the political landscape of the Middle East, Iran's ambitions have been challenged by the dynamically changing regional landscape. While neorealism’s concept of the balance of power provides a useful framework for

understanding the region during this time, its exclusive focus on state power is inadequate for understanding the impact of Sunni/Shia forces and non-state actors in the Middle East. Thus, this theory should be expanded to account for non-state actors that are able to impact the regional balance of power. Additionally, the theory of constructivism can help scholars understand identity and state interests present in the Middle East.

In the future, Iran will likely continue to adopt regional policies that reflect pragmatism, including policies that emphasize the nation's commonalities with Sunni Muslim countries. Shia beliefs may also play a role in Iran's foreign policy, but these factors will likely remain secondary to pragmatic concerns.

Chapter 3: Revolutionary Prediction – The Case of Iran

The Arab Spring's success in overthrowing entrenched authoritarian regimes proved a surprise for scholars and the Intelligence Community alike. These unanticipated events suggest the need to rethink assumptions regarding regime stability and consider if other nations might be vulnerable to social unrest. In particular, Iran's stability should be considered given the recent unrest throughout the region. Many scholars seem to assume that without outside intervention, Iran's current regime will remain in power indefinitely. Even though this may prove to be the case, failing to question this assumption could prevent scholars from anticipating a future revolution in Iran, similar to how scholars were blindsided by the events associated with the Arab Spring and the previous Iranian revolution. As Nikkie Keddie notes about the 1978-1979 Iranian revolution: ". . . virtually everyone was ignorant about the coming revolution – and this includes Iranians of all classes and the best-informed foreigners."[336]

This thesis chapter will seek to answer the following questions about Iran's stability. Should scholars anticipate that Iran's regime will remain intact for the foreseeable future? Could Iran experience social unrest or possibly even a revolution that overturns the nation's current structure of government? Another option is that Iran's future is impossible to predict. To answer these questions, this chapter will, first, examine the definition of revolutions; and second, consider literature that explores the future of Iran's regime. Next, the chapter will apply traditional scholarship on revolutionary theories to evaluate the possibility of a future revolution in Iran. While various revolutions have similarities, each is shaped by the unique ideology and the

336 Nikkie R. Keddie, "Can Revolutions be Predicted; Can Their Causes be Understood?," in *Debating Revolutions*, 3-26 (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), 4-5.

shared history of the people who help initiate them. Thus, to further evaluate these theories' applicability toward Iran, they will also be briefly analyzed in light of Iran's 1979 revolution. The chapter will explore scholarship related to revolution prediction, examining if certain conditions can alert scholars to the possibility of a future revolution in Iran. Also considered is the possibility that revolutions, by their very nature, are difficult or impossible to predict given the large amount of variables inherent in successfully overthrowing a government. Predicting revolutions can be viewed more as an art than a science in this respect.

This chapter presents a variety of evidence that suggests Iran could experience instability in the future, as well as a revolution. Even though this evidence is not conclusive, it demonstrates that most scholars have wrongly assumed that Iran's regime will continue to remain stable. Additionally, this chapter argues that a gap in scholarship exists regarding Iran's future stability. Although some scholars have discussed the topic, this chapter's research reveals that this literature is scarce. One possible explanation for the lack of literature is that scholars may simply be assuming the continuance of the current regime. Thus, to avoid being surprised by the future, more scholarship should be devoted to the topic of Iran's regime stability. This scholarship should ideally combine knowledge from area studies and revolutionary theories for maximum effectiveness. Additional scholarship should help prevent scholars and policymakers from making faulty assumptions regarding the future of Iran's regime.

Defining Revolutions

Although scholars differ on various nuances regarding revolutions, several agree on a basic definition of revolutions: movements that quickly bring about significant

change in a nation's political structure. Theda Skocpol defines social revolutions as "rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures . . . accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below."[337] Skocpol distinguishes social revolutions from rebellions, which do not impact a nation's structure; and political revolutions, which cause state, but not social, transformation.[338] Similarly, according to Samuel Huntington, "a full scale revolution . . . involves the rapid and violent destruction of existing political institutions, the mobilization of new groups into politics, and the creation of new political institutions."[339] James DeFronzo considers a revolutionary movement to be "a social movement in which participants are organized to alter drastically or replace totally existing social, economic, or political institutions."[340] Unlike Huntington, DeFronzo thinks this can occur nonviolently, but notes that most successful revolutions contain some violent aspects.[341] When referring to revolutions, this thesis chapter will use Skocpol's definition of political revolutions.

The Future of Iran's Regime

Despite the body of literature devoted to revolutions and the Arab Spring, few scholars seem to focus on the future of Iran's regime. Amongst scholars discussing this topic, most seem to think Iran will not have a revolution. An exception is Jonathan Powell, who argues that Syria's Assad regime will ultimately be toppled, which will lead

337 Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, 4.

338 *Ibid.*

339 Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (United States: Yale University, 1968), 266.

340 James DeFronzo, *Revolutions and Revolutionary Movements* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2011), 10.

341 *Ibid.*, 10.

to an Iranian revolution: "The Iranians have been helping the Syrians with their techniques of suppression. Once the young people of Iran see that those methods do not work and that the corrupt Assad regime can be overthrown, they will feel emboldened to take up their unfinished revolution once again."[342] Additionally, a modernization study conducted by several scholars argues that increasing female education and decreasing fertility in Iran will ultimately enhance democracy in the country.[343] Although this study focuses on democratization rather than revolutions, it still provides helpful analysis of Iranian society.

In contrast, several scholars argue or suggest that Iran's regime will remain in power. Jack A. Goldstone contends that unlike sultanistic states with a single, corrupt leader that causes resentment, Iran has a variety of strong leaders. Next, he asserts that the regime is supported by both the Basij and the Revolutionary Guards, neither of which would likely support protestors during social unrest. Third, he notes that Iran's "ayatollahs espouse an ideology of anti-Western Shiism and Persian nationalism that draws considerable support from ordinary people."[344] Nikkie R. Keddie, who views revolutionary movements as waves that can influence each other,[345] suggests that the Arab Spring will not influence a future revolution in Iran due to the country's distinctively non-Arab, Persian identity: "As important as the Shi'i-Sunni divide is the

342 Powell, 208.

343 Wolfgang Lutz, Crespo Cuaresma Jesus and Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi Mohammad, "Demography, Education, and Democracy: Global Trends and the Case of Iran," *Population and Development Review* 36 (June 2010): 27.

344 Jack A. Goldstone, "Understanding the Revolutions of 2011: Weakness and Resilience in Middle Eastern Autocracies," *Foreign Affairs* 90 (May/June 2011): n.p.

345 Nikkie R. Keddie, "Arab and Iranian Revolts 1979-2011: Influences or Similar Causes?," 150.

perceived ethnic divide between Persian speakers and Arabic speakers. Iranians and Arabs do not identify ethnically with one another, and many in each group feel hostile to one another. This is an obstacle to cross-ethnic influence."[346] Thus, the Arab Spring may not ignite a future Iranian revolution. However, this conclusion may be premature given the ongoing unrest in Syria. As Powell argues, Syria could inspire a revolution in Iran; or conversely, religious and ethnic dissimilarities between the two nations might prevent that from occurring.

Revolutionary Theories

Marx, Engels, and Tocqueville

Scholars have developed a variety of theories to explain revolutions, including those articulated by Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, and Alexis de Tocqueville; and those related to modernization and regime structure.[347] These theories provide an important framework for understanding revolutions. Marx and Engels were the first scholars to consider a variety of topics central to revolutionary scholarship. They argue that history transitions through stages of feudalism, capitalism, and socialism by a series of revolutions. These revolutions, they believed, would come about via class struggles.[348] While Marx and Engels' theories may not directly apply to the current situation in Iran, their theories are notable because they are the first scholars to articulate revolutionary scholarship.

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346 *Ibid.*, 151.

347 *Ibid.*, 25, 27.

348 This information is summarized by Jack A. Goldstone in his introduction to Marx and Engel's work in the following chapter: Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, 20-29 (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 20.

In contrast to Marx and Engels, who saw revolutions as catalysts of progress,[349] Tocqueville argues that revolutions enable the state to become more powerful.[350] Regarding the French revolution, Tocqueville cautions that "beneath the seemingly chaotic surface there was developing a vast, highly centralized power which attracted to itself and welded into an organic whole all the elements of authority and influence that hitherto had been dispersed among a crowd of lesser, unco-ordinated powers . . ."[351] Like Tocqueville, Skocpol and Ellen Kay Trimberger emphasize that revolutions ultimately strengthen state structures: "It is not just revolutions from above, but all revolutions that have become 'bureaucratic revolutions' – in the specific sense of creating larger, more centralized, and more autonomous state organizations than existed under the old regimes."[352] This argument should serve as a caution to scholars, many of whom hope that the Arab Spring will enable countries in the Middle East to establish less authoritarian or more liberal governments.

Similarly, Goldstone argues that revolutions always fail to provide all members of society with freedom, liberty, and equality. Moreover, he writes that revolutions often negatively impact levels of freedom and liberty. Goldstone explains that ". . . revolutions have often resulted in the exchange of one set of problems . . . for another set of

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349 Marx and Engels, 21.

350 Jack Goldstone interprets Alexis de Tocqueville's writing in this fashion in an introduction to the following chapter: Alexis de Tocqueville, "The French Revolution and the Growth of the State," in *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*, 30-31 (San Diego, California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 30.

351 Alexis de Tocqueville, 30-31.

352 Theda Skocpol and Ellen Kay Trimberger, "A Structural Approach to Revolutions," in *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*, 58-65 (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 64.

problems."[353] As Tocqueville, Skocpol, Trimberger, and Goldstone suggest, if Iran does experience a future revolution, a new Iranian regime might be more oppressive and less democratic than the current one. Thus, regime change in Iran could conceivably have negative implications for the region and for U.S.-Iran relations.

Modernization

Like Marxism, modernization theory emphasizes the impact of technology and the economy on revolutions. However, modernization theory does not argue for a certain progression of history, and does not suggest that specific economic classes will cause revolutions.[354] Samuel Huntington contends that the optimal condition for revolutions exists when social and economic transformation outpaces a society's political development and modernization. He also emphasizes the importance of political participation in revolutions, and explains that a revolution succeeds when mobilization creates political institutions.[355] In a foreword to Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Francis Fukuyama provides a helpful summary of Huntington's arguments:

> He argued that both traditional and modernized societies tended to be stable; problems occurred in the early stages of modernization, when traditional social structures were upended by new expectations. Economic growth could be stabilizing, but growth followed by sudden setback created potentially revolutionary situations.[356]

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353 Jack A. Goldstone, ed., *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*, 321.

354 DeFronzo, 27.

355 Samuel P. Huntington, "Revolution and Political Order," in *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, 39-47 (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 40.

356 Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, xiv.

Charles Tilly criticizes Huntington's theory, stating that "the scheme founders in tautologies, contradictions, omissions, and failures to examine the evidence seriously."[357] Although Tilly admits that aspects of Huntington's theory are compelling,[358] he asserts that the theory is unsatisfactory because it is unable to help predict revolutions: "Even in principle, the scheme is not really a predictive one. It is an orientation, a proposal to weigh several clusters of variables differently from the way they have been estimated n the past . . ."[359] Moreover, according to Tilly, the concepts of "modernization" and "instability" need to be further defined.[360]

Despite Tilly's criticisms, modernization theory still has several implications for Iran. First, this theory seems to explain Iran's 1979 revolution more adequately than structural theory, which will be discussed in further detail below. Fukuyama notes that the Iranian revolution could be seen as an instance of political institutions being surpassed by social mobilization: "The most notable example was the Iranian revolution of 1978, when excessively rapid state-driven modernization ran afoul of traditional social actors; merchants in the bazaar combined with radical students to produce an Islamic revolution."[361] Second, modernization theory could help explain Iran's Green Movement, when mobilized citizens protested an election perceived to be fraudulent.

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357 Charles Tilly, "Does Modernization Breed Revolution?" in *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies*, 47-57 (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986) 48.

358 *Ibid.*, 49.

359 *Ibid.*, 50-51.

360 This information is summarized by Jack A. Goldstone in his introduction to Tilly's work in the following chapter: Charles Tilly, "Does Modernization Breed Revolution?," 47.

361 Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, xiv.

Essentially, these individuals were protesting the failure of political institutions to respect their selection of a more moderate candidate.

Third, according to modernization theory, the growth or sudden contraction of a nation's economy can lead to a revolution. Currently, Iran's economy has been impacted by the weight of sanctions due to its nuclear program. Sanctions directed against Iran have weakened the nation's economy, caused the devaluing of the rial (Iran's currency), and led to increased inflation.[362] In 2012/2013, sanctions impacted the production and export of Iranian crude oil, and Iran's economy contracted by an estimated 3 percent.[363] According to a Gallup survey, 56 percent of Iranians believe that "sanctions hurt Iranians' livelihoods." Although the poll indicates that most Iranians consider the United States, not their own government, to be "most responsible for the sanctions," the widespread impact of sanctions likely poses policy challenges for the Iranian regime.[364] Moreover, the Gallup survey found that "thirty-one percent of Iranians rated their lives poorly enough to be considered 'suffering' in 2012 – one of the highest rates in the greater Middle East North Africa region."[365]

Iran's significant economic challenges, including the high rate of suffering experienced by its people, could contribute to a future revolution. As mentioned later in

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362 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran Sanctions*, by Kenneth Katzman., CRS Report RS20871 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, October 11, 2013), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf (accessed November 2, 2013), n.p.

363 Economist Intelligence Unit, "Country Report: Iran," no. 5 (May 2013): 6. The 2012/2013 data appears to be based on the Iranian year, which begins on 21 March. See page 13 for more information.

364 Mohamed Younis, "Iranians Feel the Bite of Sanctions, Blame U.S., Not Own Leaders," *GALLUP World*, February 7, 2013, http://www.gallup.com/poll/160358/iranians-feel-bite-sanctions-blame-not-own-leaders.aspx (accessed November 6, 2013).

365 *Ibid*.

this chapter, unemployment can be linked to unrest and regime change.[366] Moreover, under modernization theory, a reversal of this trend could also have destabilizing effects on Iran. Should negotiations under the new Rouhani government cause some sanctions to be lifted, Iran could conceivably experience rapid growth, especially if the sanctions allow its oil industry to become more profitable. This growth could lead to instability and a revolt.

Modernization theory's emphasis on technology should serve as a reminder that technology can have important implications for mass mobilization. Technology influenced social unrest in Iran during the Green Movement,[367] when young Iranians used Internet technologies such as email and blogs to help with organization, mobilization, and communication.[368] For example, the Internet helped delegitimize the Iranian regime due to the spread of videos and images showing protestors being brutally suppressed by state forces.[369] Nonetheless, an authoritarian state could use technology to suppress its citizens.[370] Iran's regime used a variety of methods to suppress the Green Movement. For instance, Iran attempted to restrict Internet access by escalating filtering measures and reducing bandwidths and connection speeds. Iran has also used technology to

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366 Isabel Ortiz and Matthew Cummins, "When the Global Crisis and Youth Bulge Collide: Double the Jobs Trouble for Youth," UNICEF, Social and Economic Policy Working Paper, February 2012, http://www.unicef.org/socialpolicy/files/Global_Crisis_and_Youth_Bulge_FINAL_web.pdf (accessed Octber 13, 2013), 23.

367 Saeid Golkar, "Liberation or Suppression Technologies? The Internet, the Green Movement and the Regime in Iran," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society* 9 (2011): 63.

368 *Ibid.*, 55.

369 *Ibid.*, 56.

370 *Ibid.*, 53.

identify and arrest dissidents. In particular, the Cyber Force of Iran's IRGC has monitored and arrested activists and bloggers.[371] Thus, technology could either harm or hinder a future revolution in Iran.

Structural Theory

Skocpol and Trimberger, two leading structural theorists, contend that revolutions can occur when state structures are destabilized, and that a successful revolution replaces old structures with new or altered forms of government.[372] Skocpol further articulates her theory as follows:

> . . . the repressive state organizations of the prerevolutionary regime have to be weakened *before* mass revolutionary action can succeed, or even emerge. Indeed, historically, mass rebellions have not been able, in itself, to overcome state repression. Instead, military pressures from abroad, often accompanied by political splits between dominant classes and the state, have been necessary to undermine repression and open the way for social-revolutionary upheavals from below.[373]

Skocpol also argues against modernization theory, noting that modernization is not sufficient to produce revolutions.[374] Goldstone, who provides further analysis of Skocpol's theory, explains that the following elements need to coalesce to spur a revolution: "a state facing competition from stronger states, an autonomous political elite with leverage against the state and the ability to resist taxation and block state policy, and

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371 *Ibid.*, 59-60.

372 Skocpol *and* Trimberger, 62-63.

373 Theda Skocpol, "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution," *Theory and Society* 11 (1982): 266. It is worth noting that in this article, Skocpol is providing a summary of her previous theories before considering the challenges of applying them to the 1979 Iranian revolution. This article will be discussed in more details in the following paragraphs of this thesis.

374 Ibid., 266.

a peasantry with autonomy from direct supervision and a collective framework for mobilization . . ."[375]

Under Skocpol's theory, if Iran's government is structurally weak, it could be vulnerable to a future revolution. Two elements indicate that Iran possesses a moderate degree of structural weakness: it faces significant competition from other states both regionally and internationally, and internal opposition movements suggest the existence of political schisms that could challenge Iran's current regime. First, Iran faces competition from a variety of nations. Iran's hostile relationship with Israel has influenced the nation's support of Hezbollah and alliance with Syria. A RAND report notes, "With Israel as the only regional state considering military action against Iran as its nuclear efforts move forward, the rivalry between Israel and Iran has emerged as a defining feature of the current regional environment."[376] Moreover, the competition is unequal given that Israel is militarily superior to Iran.[377] Next, Iran faces a rivalry with the United States, who has enacted stringent policies toward Iran designed to hamper the nation's nuclear program. Currently, both the United States and the United Nations Security Council have sanctions in place against Iran.[378] Saudi Arabia, who enjoys a good relationship with the United States, also represents a major source of regional

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375 Jack A. Goldstone, "Predicting Revolutions: Why we Could (and should) Have Foreseen the Revolutions of 1989-1991 in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe," in *Debating Revolutions*, ed. Nikkie R. Keddie, 39-64 (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), 52.

376 Dalia Dassa Kaye, Alireza Nader and Parisa Roshan, *Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2011), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1143.pdf (accessed November 10, 2013), 3.

377 Kay, Nader, and Rohan, 4.

378 Robert J. Reardon, *Containing Iran: Strategies for Addressing the Iranian Nuclear Challenge*, 119.

competition for Iran. The two nations could be seen as "represent[ing] opposing poles of influence and interests . . ."[379] These rivalries likely contribute to Iranian insecurity.

Second, Iran's opposition movements indicate the presence of political schisms, which further suggest regime weakness. The opposition movement/Green Movement is comprised of a variety of groups, individuals, and political elites, including student groups, the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF), the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization (MIR), the Combatant Clerics Association, and labor unions.[380] The Green Movement has been described as a "struggle between two camps: the religious conservatives (traditionalists) who supported the regime and the principle of absolute guardianship of the jurist, and liberals, both Islamic and secular."[381] Within the liberal camp are religious liberals, who tend to advocate for the current system to be reformed, and secular liberals, who would prefer the regime to be overturned. However, the secular liberals have acknowledged religious liberal leaders, such as former president Mohammad Khatami and Rafsanjani, Mahdi Karubi, and Mir Hossein Mousavi.[382]

Rouhani's electoral success could indicate the existence of a strong opposition element in Iran.[383] Nonetheless, scholars and policymakers should remember that

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379 U.S. Library of Congress, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, November 2013, 39.

380 *Ibid.*, 5-6.

381 Hooshang Amirahmadi and Shahir ShahidSaless, "Avoid Repeating Mistakes Toward Iran," *The Washington Quarterly* 36 (December 2012): 152.

382 *Ibid.*, 152.

383 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, by Kenneth Katzman, CRS Report RL32048 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, March 5, 2014), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32048.pdf (accessed March 22, 2014), n.p.

Rouhani is a political insider whose campaign emphasized reform, not democracy.[384] Suzanne Maloney notes, "There was nothing in Rouhani's past experience that suggested he might be a closet liberalizer."[385] In addition, Rouhani remains subject to the leadership of Khamenei, who will likely retain his influence over judicial, media, and military matters.[386] Moreover, Rouhani's win could strengthen Iran's current regime. Katzman argues: "The victory of Rouhani could also revive the popularity of Iran's regime, particularly if Rouhani is able to implement campaign pledges to ease repression and social restrictions."[387]

Other structural elements of Iran's government could to contribute to the current regime's resiliency. In particular, Iran's identity as a post-revolutionary regime could help insulate it from other forms of structural weakness. Levitsky and Way assert that revolutionary regimes are more durable than other regimes, and thus less likely to be overthrown.[388] They emphasize that "revolutionary violence . . . engenders strikingly robust regime institutions."[389] For example, Iran's revolution led to the creation of

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384 House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Middle East and North Africa, *Statement of Karim Sadjadpour*, *Senior Associate, Middle East Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 18, 2013, n.p.

385 Suzanne Maloney, "Iran's New President Starts Off With A Familiar Strategy," Brookings, August 6, 2013, http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/iran-at-saban/posts/2013/08/06-iran-rouhani-administration (accessed November 3, 2013).

386 House Committee on Foreign Affairs, n.p.

387 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses*, by Kenneth Katzman, CRS Report RL32048 (Washington, DC: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing, June 17, 2013), http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/211406.pdf (accessed March 22, 2014), n.p.

388 Stevin Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Durability of Revolutionary Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 24 (July 2013): 5-6.

389 *Ibid.*, 15.

organizations such as the Basij and the Revolutionary Guard, both of which helped suppress protestors during the Green Revolution in 2009.[390] Next, Iran's system of government allows for elections, which have traditionally contributed to regime stability. Gunes Murat Tezcur argues that the elections "limited the willingness and capacity of elites to abandon institutional channels in favor of extraparliamentary strategies."[391] Third, Iran's regime has shown resiliency in the face of unrest – it was able to retain control despite the 2009 demonstrations.[392]

Thus, some structural elements of Iran's government indicate weakness, whereas other aspects suggest regime stability and resiliency. However, state structure might not be as strongly linked to revolutions as Skocpol and Trimberger argue. For instance, their theory may be inadequate to explain the 1979 revolution in Iran. Charles Kurzman states: "Indeed, I argue that the state was *not*, by several objective measures, particularly vulnerable in 1978 when widespread protests emerged. Instead, Iranians seem to have based their assessment of the opportunities for protest on the perceived strength of the opposition."[393] Even Skocpol herself, in an article written after the Iranian revolution, admits that the revolution "challenged expectations about revolutionary causation that I

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390 *Ibid.*, 12.

391 Gunes Murat Tezcur, "Democratic Struggles and Authoritarian Responses in Iran in Comparative Perspective," in *Middle East Authoritarianisms: Governance, Contestation, and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran*, ed. Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders, 200-221 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 208-209.

392 *Ibid.*, 218.

393 Charles Kurzman, "Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979," *American Sociological Review* 61 (February 1996): 155. Kurzman also examines four elements frequently identified by scholars as weaknesses of the Pahlavi regime, arguing that these elements were not weaknesses of state structure.

developed . . .”[394] However, Skocpol affirmed the importance of structural theory, further noting that in her work, *States and Social Revolutions,* she had included the caveat that a general revolutionary theory could never apply to all circumstances.[395] Nonetheless, she still admitted that the Iranian revolution “did not just come; it was deliberately and coherently made – specifically in its opening phase, the overthrow of the old regime.”[396]

Eric Selbin notes that scholars are challenging structuralism due to happenings in Iran and Nicaragua. In particular, some scholars are emphasizing the impact of ideology, human decision-making, and culture on revolutions. Selbin’s argument that people and ideology influence revolutions[397] highlights an important flaw of structural theory: the failure to account for historical grievances and ideologies that could drive a group of people to revolt, regardless of whether weaknesses exist in their government’s structure. As Selbin articulates, “agents and structure both play critical roles, which may shift and vary over time, in any revolutionary process.”[398] Thus, structural theory may be best understood when combined with a historical and ideological understanding of countries and people groups. Goldstone argues that scholars may have failed to predict revolutions

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394 Theda Skocpol, "Rentier State,” 265.

395 *Ibid.*, 268.

396 *Ibid.*, 267.

397 Eric Selbin, "What was Revolutionary about the Iranian Revolution? The Power of Possibility," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, & the Middle East* 29 (2009): 36.

398 *Ibid.*, 37.

in the past because they were experts in area studies, not revolutions.[399] Conversely, revolutionary theories might fall short because they fail to take area studies under account. An ideal understanding of revolutions would unite the disciplines of area studies and revolutionary theory for a complete picture of how revolutions occur.

Predicting Revolutions

While some scholars contend that revolutions can be anticipated and provide suggestions for their prediction, others argue that predicting revolutions is a difficult or impossible feat. Goldstone defines revolution prediction as identifying "states that are moving rapidly toward a revolutionary situation, so that if trends continue unchecked a revolution is highly likely to break out when a triggering or accelerating event occurs."[400] He asserts that revolutions can be predicted within a one to two year timeframe, but cautions that scholars cannot precisely determine a revolution's timing.[401] Goldstone offers three elements he believes can serve as a model for revolution prediction:

> . . . the model argues that a society is careening toward revolution when there arises a *conjuncture* of three conditions: (1) the state loses effectiveness in its ability to command resources and obedience; (2) elites are alienated from the state and in heightened conflict over the distribution of power and status; and (3) a large or strategic portion of the population can be readily mobilized for protest actions.[402]

DeFronzo also provides a list of similar elements he believes are likely needed for a successful revolution: widespread discontentment that spurs anti-government protests,

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399 Goldstone, "Predicting Revolutions," 42.

400 *Ibid.*, 41.

401 *Ibid.*, 42.

402 *Ibid.*, 45.

elite movements opposed to the current regime, widespread revolutionary motivators that unify a broad swath of the populace, and a state political crisis.[403]

Goldstone and DeFronzo's models help provide clarity regarding why the 2009 Green Movement protests did not overthrow Iran's regime. Despite facing unrest, Iran never lost its ability to "command resources and obedience," as Goldstone articulated.[404] The state responded to the demonstrations with violence and was ultimately able to quell the unrest.[405] Next, although elites were involved in the Green Movement, as noted above, they tended to be religious leaders interested in reform, not overthrow of the regime.[406] Finally, the movement failed to inspire widespread appeal beyond the urban middle class. Tezcur states that "the reformist leadership could not establish coalitions transcending class, regional, and ethnic differences."[407] Similarly, Farideh Farhi explains, "The Green Movement is representative of only a portion of the middle class in Iran. In short, the Islamic Republic has given birth to an ideologically differentiated middle class." Farhi further notes that elements of middle class are also supportive of conservatives and hardliners.[408] If Iran's opposition movement built a broader base of support and attracted elite leaders interested in regime change instead of reform, it could be more effective in challenging the current regime and spurring a revolution. Because

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403 DeFronzo, 12-13.

404 Goldstone, "Predicting Revolutions," 45.

405 Tezcur, 217-218.

406 This is suggested in Hooshang Amirahmadi and Shahir ShahidSaless, 152.

407 Tezcur, 219.

408 Farideh Farhi, "Tehran's Delayed Spring," *Globalizations* 8 (October 2011): 619.

Iran's opposition movement has not evolved to this point, based on Goldstone and DeFronzo's criteria, Iran does not seem poised for an imminent, future revolution. However, Iran's opposition movement could conceivably change, thus making a revolution more likely in the future.

Specific Indicators

Goldstone cautions that scholars should avoid making lists that identify specific conditions for revolutions.[409] However, some scholars have argued that certain indicators are tied to revolutions. Generally, these scholars do not offer comprehensive lists, but rather examine one or two conditions they believe could point to the possibility of future revolution. For instance, various scholars have argued that youth bulges – or a large population of youth – can lead to a higher risk of violence.[410] Henrik Urdal evaluated this claim by using data on internal armed conflict from 1950 to 2000. His analysis links youth bulges to terrorist acts, riots and violent protests, and internal armed conflict.[411] In a UNICEF working paper, Isabel Ortiz and Matthew Cummins note that many countries are facing unemployment concerns, as well as a youth bulge.[412] According to Ortiz and Cummins, countries with youth bulges are especially susceptible to social and political unrest.[413] Moreover, their paper considers unemployment as strongly related to increased

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409 Goldstone, "Prediction Revolutions," 44.

410 Henrik Urdal, "A Clash of Generations? Youth Bulges and Political Violence," *International Studies Quarterly* 50 (2006): 607.

411 *Ibid.*, 607, 623.

412 Ortiz and Cummins, iv.

413 *Ibid.*, 32.

social unrest and, ultimately, regime change.[414] These issues have important implications for Iran, given that Iran was listed as number 73 in a chart titled "top 80 countries with largest share of youth in total national population, 2012" and number 25 in a table titled "top 50 countries with lowest youth employment-to-population ratios, 2010."[415]

Another possible factor related to a revolution's success is the response of a nation's armed forces to revolt. According to Zoltan Barany, for revolutions to succeed, they usually need to be backed by a segment of the regular army.[416] Barany notes that while it is not the only condition for a successful revolution, ". . . the military's backing of or at least neutrality toward the revolution is a *necessary* condition for revolutionary success."[417] Furthermore, Barany argues that it is possible to intelligently guess an armed forces' response to revolt.[418] Based on its response to the Green Movement, Iran's military would likely back the regime and possibly engage in suppression measures should a future revolution arise. However, the Arab Spring showed that revolutions can continue despite facing violence from the current regime. For instance, the revolution in Syria continued despite the harsh suppression measures used by the government.[419]

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414 Ortiz and Cummins., 23.

415 *Ibid.*, 9 and 15.

416 Zoltan Barany, "Armies and Revolutions," *Journal of Democracy* 24 (April 2013): 62.

417 *Ibid.*, 63.

418 *Ibid.*, 63.

419 Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring," *Comparative Politics* 44 (January 2012): 140.

John James Kennedy identifies several factors he believes led to the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, including a population that is extensively dissatisfied with top political leaders.[420] Although discontent might be an important element in revolution prediction, Iranians' perceptions of the regime are difficult to assess due to the need to be sensitive while conducting surveys.[421] Data from a 2012 Pew Research survey indicates that Iranians have varied perceptions on clerical involvement in politics, which suggests that Iranians could have mixed views on their current government led by a supreme, clerical leader. A majority of Iranians (66 percent) thought that "religious figures should have at least *some* influence in political matters," but only 40 percent of Iranians wanted religious figures to hold a large amount of influence.[422] A study by RAND Corporation shows that a significant number of Iranians support many of Iran's current policies, but also notes that some respondents seemed uncomfortable with the survey and may have been worried about government monitoring.[423] Therefore, this indicator is challenging to apply due to the difficulties associated with conducting surveys in Iran.

Revolutions Cannot Be Predicted

Some scholars contend that revolutions are difficult or possibly impossible to predict and, as such, will continue to surprise scholars. For instance, Timur Kuran states

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420 John James Kennedy, "What is the Color of Non-Revolution? Why the Jasmine Revolution and Arab Spring Did Not Spread to China," *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* 13 (December 2012): 63.

421 See Sara Beth Elson and Alireza Nader and "Iranians' Views Mixed on Political Role for Religious Figures," *PewResearch Religion & Public Life Project*, June 11, 2013, http://www.pewforum.org/2013/06/11/iranians-views-mixed-on-political-role-for-religious-figures/ (accessed November 4, 2013). Both surveys note they could not ask Iranians certain questions due to the need to be sensitive.

422 "Iranians' Views Mixed on Political Role for Religious Figures."

423 Elson and Nader, xii.

that scholars can determine which nations will likely encounter revolution, but because of preference falsification, revolutions will continue to be surprising. Kuran further explains: "The argument hinges on preference falsification – the act of misrepresenting one's preferences under perceived social pressures. By falsifying their preferences with regard to the incumbent regime, disgruntled citizens distort perceptions of the potential for political change."[424]

Revolutions may also be difficult to predict due to challenges with timing. Eva Bellin writes that the Arab Spring had a contagious effect – individuals throughout the region became empowered when they saw Tunisia's Ben Ali successfully deposed. Bellin essentially suggests that because revolutions can influence each other, a successful model for revolution prediction would be difficult (or impossible) to develop.[425] Similarly, according to Jeff Goodwin, the Tunisian fruit vendor who lit himself on fire helped spur "something like a 'revolutionary bandwagon'" that impacted the subsequent revolutions in Egypt and Syria. Goodwin further argues that the extent of this revolutionary spread could not have been predicted.[426] Furthermore, Keddie argues that revolutions might be able to be predicted, but many "occur in new conditions and have largely new patterns." Thus, it is unsurprising that some revolutions are not anticipated.[427]

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424 Timur Kuran, "The Inevitability of Future Revolutionary Surprises," *American Journal of Sociology* 100 (May 1995): 1528.

425 Bellin, 141.

426 Jeff Goodwin, "Why We Were Surprised (Again) by the Arab Spring," *Swiss Political Science Review* 17 (2011): 453.

427 Nikki R. Keddie, "Response to Goldstone," in *Debating Revolutions*, ed. Nikkie R. Keddie, 65-76 (New York and London: New York University Press, 1995), 74.

Bellin and Kuran's arguments are compelling, especially when considering that revolutionary theories often fail to explain every instance of regime overthrow. In addition, theories frequently do not consider ideological and historical factors, elements that could also be difficult to quantify into a model. Moreover, some indicators, such as a population's support of the current regime, can be difficult to assess via surveys and are likely tainted by preference falsification. However, theories and indicators, while not perfect, can still provide scholars and policymakers with a framework for analysis and alert scholars to the possibility of a future revolution. Theories and indicators should inspire analysis, and thus should prevent scholars and policymakers from blindly assuming that a regime will continue indefinitely.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what do these theories, indicators, and studies tell us about the future of Iran's regime? The information discussed in this chapter indicates that Iran's future is less certain than most scholars seem to assume. The variety of evidence examined, although inconclusive, shows that weaknesses present in Iran's regime could lead to future regime change. Under modernization theory, Iran could experience a future revolution if its economic difficulties continue, or if the nation experiences rapid economic growth due to the lifting of sanctions. Structural theory suggests that Iran's government has both strengths and weaknesses. Iran is currently facing competition from several strong states, including Israel, the United States, and Saudi Arabia; as well as possible internal political schisms that could lead to instability. However, Iran is also a post-revolutionary, durable regime that has proven to be resilient.

Scholars have identified various indicators that help predict social unrest and regime overthrow, but these indicators fail to provide conclusive guidance regarding Iran's future. While Iran has a large population of youth, Iran's military would likely not support a future revolution, and Iranian perceptions of the current regime are difficult to assess. In addition, the unrest in Syria could help spark a revolution in Iran, but the two countries might be too dissimilar for this to occur. Ultimately, although Iran's future is unknown, the mixed evidence suggests that many scholars have placed too much confidence in the longevity of the current Iranian regime. This topic appears to be a blind spot in most current scholarship and is worthy of increased attention from academic community and policymakers alike.

The research and analysis contained in this chapter offers additional implications for scholars and policymakers. First, more overlap needs to occur between area studies and revolutionary scholarship. Revolutionary theories have traditionally ignored important factors often tied to area studies, such as a nation's history, religion, and ideology. In contrast, area studies scholars occasionally ignore revolutionary scholarship, and thus, are surprised when revolutions occur. Second, revolution prediction is more of an art than a science, and may not be able to offer concrete, conclusive guidance regarding a nation's future. However, theories and indicators can still help scholars identify red flags that might indicate future unrest or regime change. Third, to avoid future revolutionary surprises, more research should be devoted to the possibility of future revolutions, particularly relating to Iran. While conducting research, scholars and policymakers should avoid assuming that regimes will remain stable, but instead retain an open mind that surprises can, and do occur.

Conclusion

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the United States' relationship with Iran has been fraught with enmity. U.S. policymakers and scholars must seek solutions to improve this relationship, given that Iran threatens U.S. security interests, controls a portion of the strategic Strait of Hormuz, and holds a position of influence in the Middle East. The historically strained relationship between the two countries suggests that scholars and policymakers should attempt to improve their understanding of Iran. This thesis attempts to lessen this gap by providing insight into various aspects of Iran's behavior, with an emphasis on various international relations and revolutionary theories.

Chapter one considers a topic of *international* significance: Iran's nuclear program. In particular, this chapter considers what policies the United States should adopt that could best impede Iran's nuclear ambitions. First, the chapter analyzes examines two international relations theories – realism and liberalism – and subsequently considers how they can help explain Iran's behavior and inform policymaking. Second, the chapter considers the status of Iran's nuclear program. Evidence presented in this section demonstrates that Iran's nuclear capabilities should be of concern to U.S. policymakers. Third, the chapter examines various policy options, arguing that the United States should pursue a multi-policy approach of engagement, public diplomacy, and sanctions. While nuclear talks under Iran's Rouhani administration are a promising development in U.S.-Iran relations, sanctions should not be lifted unless the outcome of such talks serves U.S. security interests. Moreover, the United States should strive to act multilaterally towards Iran, as this enhances U.S. legitimacy, increases policy

effectiveness, promotes the judicious use of U.S. power, and prolongs the United States' position as the world hegemon.

In chapter two, this thesis examines Iran's *regional* behavior by analyzing how Shiism influences Iran's regional policymaking. To provide a framework for this analysis, this chapter begins by considering neorealism and constructivism. This section argues that neorealism's balance of power concept fails to align with regional dynamics present in the Middle East because it focuses solely on state behavior. Because non-state actors contribute to Middle Eastern power dynamics, they should be included in the balance of power equation. This section also asserts that constructivism can help scholars better comprehend matters of identity and state interest, but lacks a mechanism for helping scholars determine state intentions. Next, this chapter analyzes how Iran's Shia identity impacts several aspects of Iranian foreign policy. In particular, the chapter looks at Iran's aspirations toward regional hegemony, its strategic relationship with Iraq, its nuclear ambitions, and its support of Hamas and Hezbollah. The chapter concludes by arguing that Shiism has less influence on Iranian foreign policy than pragmatism.

Chapter three analyzes whether Iran's regime will remain stable for the foreseeable future. This *national* or internal topic has particular salience given that revolutions often take scholars by surprise, as illustrated by the Arab Spring and the Iranian revolution of 1979. Although a few scholars have considered the issue, scholarship is limited and weighted toward the opinion that Iran will retain its current system of government. However, when examined through the lens of revolutionary theory, Iran's government appears susceptible to unrest or a revolution. Moreover, the youth bulge present in Iran could lead to future instability. Even so, a future Iranian

revolution might be a harmful development for the United States. As Theda Skocpol and Ellen Kay Trimberger argue, revolutions create "larger, more centralized, and more autonomous state organizations than existed under the old regimes."[428] Finally, chapter three argues that revolutionary surprises occur because area studies and revolutionary theory often fail to work in tandem. Theorists and area studies scholars, therefore, should seek to combine their areas of expertise to better anticipate revolutions.

Lessons Learned

1. *Policymakers and Scholars Must Understand How Shiism Impacts Iran's Behavior*

This thesis portfolio offers four important insights into Iran's behavior. First, to understand Iran, scholars and policymakers need to possess a knowledge of Shiism. Iran has the largest population of Shias in the world,[429] but only 10 to 15 percent of Muslims worldwide are Shia.[430] As discussed in chapter two of this portfolio, Iran's government is based on Khomeini's theory of *velayat-e-faqih*, which asserts that Shia clerics have the authority to rule politically.[431] Iran's Shia identity has important implications for its system of government, but can impede Iran's attempts to build relations with other Middle Eastern, predominantly Sunni countries – a task further complicated by the fact that Iran is Persian, not Arab. Moreover, Sunni nations have expressed suspicion towards Iran's attempts to gain regional influence. For example, Jordan's King Abdullah II

428 Theda Skocpol and Ellen Kay Trimberger, "A Structural Approach to Revolutions," 64.

429 Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 212.

430 Mandaville, 40.

431 Arjomand, 21.

famously cautioned that a "Shiite crescent" was stretching from Iran and Iraq towards Lebanon and Syria.[432] To mitigate these concerns, Iran appears to downplay its Shia identity when attempting to relate to Sunni nations. Iran's support of Hezbollah and Hamas, along with its vitriolic rhetoric against Israel and the West, could be attempts to garner support from Arab nations. Ray Takeyh asserts, ". . . Iran's inflammatory denunciations (even of Israel) can be partly attributed to its attempt to mobilize the region behind its leadership."[433]

Nonetheless, as chapter three argues, Iran seems to emphasize its Shia identity when relating to other Shias, including the Shia community in Iraq. For instance, Iran funds Iraqi Shia political parties and sends scholars and students to the Iraqi Shia cities of Karbala and Najaf. However, these actions seem largely motivated by practical, rather than religious, considerations. Iran would likely have a better relationship with an Iraq governed primarily by Shias, rather than Sunnis. In addition, Iran's use of economic soft power toward Iraq is likely intended to mitigate the influence of Iraq's Grand Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani, who does not vocally support the Iranian concept of *velayat-e faqih.* Thus, Shiism and *veyalat-e faqih* are important to understand because they impact Iran's system of government and its regional posture.

2. *Iran is a Rational Actor*

Second, despite its provocative rhetoric and belligerent actions, Iran is primarily a pragmatic actor whose foreign policies are driven by rational objectives. As argued in a RAND report: "Our exploration of Iranian strategic thinking revealed that ideology and

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432 Smith.

433 Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, 260.

bravado frequently mask a preference for opportunism and realpolitik–the qualities that define 'normal' state behavior."[434] Iran's pragmatism has important implications for understanding the nation's behavior, especially regarding the nuclear program. First, this thesis argues that the Iranian nuclear program is primarily motivated by deterrence, regional goals, and internal regime popularity. Admittedly, Ahmadinejad's support of the nuclear program could have been motivated by apocalyptic Shia messianism. In particular, evidence suggests that Ahmadinejad was part of a group that believed that the return of the Mahdi could be sped up through technology.[435] However, Ahmadinejad likely had less control over Iran's nuclear program than the more rational Khamenei. Moreover, Iran's current president, Rouhani, is likely more rational than Ahmadinejad and has been described as having a "centrist-pragmatic agenda."[436] Thus, it seems likely that Iran's nuclear program is currently motivated by rational considerations.

Next, pragmatism should impact how U.S. policymakers view the Iranian nuclear threat. Even if Iran possessed a nuclear weapon, its use would likely be limited to cases of regime survival. However, the United States should still attempt to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, given that such a weapon would increase Iran's stature in the region and provide the nation with additional leverage. This could have negative implications for U.S. energy security and key U.S. relationships in the region, including the United States' relationship with Saudi Arabia and Israel. Moreover, the United States would likely be forced to adopt a more cautious posture toward Iran.

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434 Wehrey et al., xiii-xiv.

435 Mehdi Khalaji, *Apocalyptic Politics: On the Rationality of Iranian Policy*, vii.

436 Monshirpouri and Dorraj, 134.

Iran's rationality suggests that the nation might be willing to agree to a long-term nuclear deal with the P5+1 countries, especially if an agreement removes sanctions currently directed toward Iran. Although the nuclear program benefits Iran, it also comes at a cost to the nation's economy. Due to sanctions levied against Iran, Iran's oil exports dropped from 2.5 million barrels per day in 2011 to 1 million barrels per day by late 2013. This decrease has significant implications for Iran's government, which depends on oil exports to fund almost half of its expenditures. A report by the Congressional Research Service assesses that the sanctions levied against Iran drove the nation to accept an interim agreement on November 24, 2013.[437] Although research examined in chapter one indicates that sanctions are often ineffective, in this instance, they could help spur Iran toward accepting a more permanent nuclear deal. A potentially effective agreement, therefore, could appeal to Iran's pragmatism by promising economic relief.

3. Theories and Area Studies Need to Work Together

Third, this thesis demonstrates that theories are most effective when combined with area studies. Specifically, this thesis showed that revolutionary theory, when applied to Iran, indicates that Iran's system of government is less stable than many scholars tend to assume. Modernization theory should prompt scholars to examine economic factors and consider whether they could contribute to a future revolution. Under this theory, Iran could experience instability and possibly a revolution if Rouhani's government is unable to lift the sanctions and improve Iran's economic condition. Conversely, given that modernization theory argues that economic growth can be destabilizing, instability could also occur if Iran experiences sudden growth.

437 U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran Sanctions*, January 15, 2014, n.p.

Next, scholars should consider whether governments possess structural weaknesses, which could also lead to a revolution. Structural theory, as articulated by Theda Skocpol, argues that "military pressures from abroad, often accompanied by political splits between dominant classes and the state, have been necessary to undermine repression and open the way for social-revolutionary upheavals from below."[438] When applied to Iran, this theory also suggests that Iran's government is unstable. Iran faces pressures from a variety of nations, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. In addition, a variety of Iranian opposition groups have already contributed to instability via protests associated with the Green Movement.

Revolutionary theory should also prompt scholars and policymakers to view revolutions cautiously, given that they can often hamper democracy. By pointing to the French Revolution, Alexis de Tocqueville argues that revolutions create stronger, more authoritarian states.[439] This should remind scholars and policymakers that a revolution in Iran might lead to a less democratic Iranian regime and could be a negative development for U.S.-Iran relations.

4. Multiple Policies Should Be Adopted Toward Iran

Fourth, to improve its relationship with Iran and reduce security concerns, the United States should adopt multiple policies toward Iran. As James Dobbins has argued, "sanctions and negotiations are not alternatives" and are effective when exercised in

438 Theda Skocpol, "Rentier State," 266. It is worth noting that in this article, Skocpol is providing a summary of her previous theories before considering the challenges of applying them to the 1979 Iranian revolution.

439 Tocqueville, 30-31.

tandem.[440] In addition, the United States should intensify public diplomacy initiatives directed toward Iran. Walter R. Roberts explains that the goal of public diplomacy is "to create, for a given country, as positive a climate as possible among foreign publics in order to facilitate the explanation and hopefully acceptance of its foreign policy."[441] Although specific funding information regarding U.S. public diplomacy efforts toward Iran is unavailable, this funding appears to have decreased in priority. Thus, United States should consider increasing this funding as a way of expanding U.S. soft power toward Iran. In particular, as suggested by several RAND scholars, the United States should support radio broadcasts, educational exchanges, and interactions between U.S. officials and members of Iran's media.[442] Public diplomacy should not seek to directly cause regime change, but should encourage moderation in Iranian politics and a greater understanding of U.S. policy. In addition, public diplomacy must be conducted cautiously, as overt western support for Iranian opposition elements could actually harm these groups' effectiveness.

Additional Research

The current body of literature can be divided into two camps: theorists who focus on international relations and revolutionary theories, and area studies scholars who often concentrate on historical and political factors. As mentioned previously, additional research should seek to combine these two schools of thought. In particular, scholars should revisit the balance of power concept and consider whether a revision or a new

440 Dobbins, 161-162.

441 Roberts, 45.

442 Crane, Lal, Martini, xix.

theory could better fit with the current climate in the Middle East. Scholars should also use modernization and structural revolutionary theory to evaluate their assumptions regarding Iran's regime stability. In addition, realism, liberalism, and constructivism can provide insights into Iran's behavior, help explain regional dynamics, and assist with policymaking.

Further research should also focus on developing strategies for the ongoing nuclear talks with Iran. The United States must ensure that the resulting long-term agreement advances U.S. security interests without significantly ostracizing allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the United States must also consider whether the talks should address other areas of concern, such as Iran's support for terrorist groups and its human rights violations. Given that Iran is motivated by pragmatic concerns, negotiation strategies should likely include the offer to reduce or remove sanctions in exchange for Iran's cooperation. Ultimately, Iran will have to determine whether its strategic goals are best achieved by defying the international community and continuing its nuclear program, or by acceding to an agreement that provides the nation with relief from sanctions.

Going forward, U.S. foreign policy must continue to prioritize Iran by adopting strategies designed to improve U.S.-Iran relations and mitigate security concerns. To accomplish these objectives, scholars and policymakers must seek a greater understanding of Iran's behavior and craft their scholarship and policymaking accordingly. The new Iranian administration under President Rouhani appears open to improving its relationship with United States and the West. Although the United States' relationship with Iran will likely not dramatically improve in the immediate future, the

United States should cautiously engage the new administration in hopes that a less hostile relationship can be achieved.

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